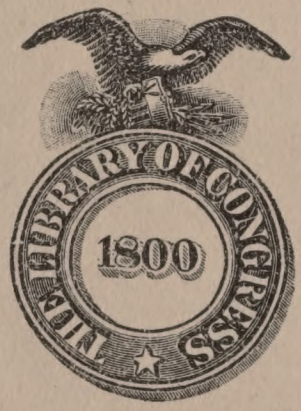
MARIAN FREAR'S SUMMER

Margaret Ashmun



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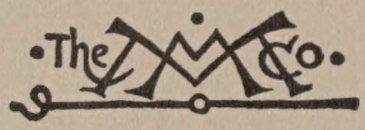

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"The new people," she whispered.

MARIAN FREAR'S SUMMER

BY

MARGARET ASHMUN

Author of "Isabel Carleton's Year," "Isabel Carleton's Friends," "Stephen's Last Chance," etc.

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TO

DOROTHY S. CURNOW

AN ENGLISH WOMAN WHO
LOVES AMERICA

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MARIAN FREAR'S SUMMER

CHAPTER I

LAUGHTER

MARIAN FREAR was on her knees, thinning out the young carrots from the long rows next to the fence. Her slender brown hands were busy among the leaves, and the small green and yellow heap beside her was swiftly increasing.

"Almost finished," the girl said, half aloud, as she glanced toward the end of the row on which she was working. She stopped and straightened her shoulders, and pushed back the old straw hat which she wore. Her gaze wandered beyond the pasture to the quick blue sparkle of the lake, where it showed through the poplars and cherry trees. Her eyes were wistful and intent. She had a finely outlined mouth and chin, and soft hair, almost black, which was drawn severely away from her face, and braided into a hard flat oval at her neck. Just now her expression was far from happy.

It was late in the afternoon of a day in July. The wind was pleasantly cool, but the sun felt hot on Marian's shoulders, through the blue print dress.

The girl had just gone back to her nearly completed task, when the voice of a woman called to her across the currant bushes, "You'd better stop, Merry, dear. There's no use in working too hard. You can finish to-morrow."

"There's only a tiny bit more to do," Marian responded. "I might as well get it done." Her hands flew more rapidly among the feathery leaves.

"Oh, well —" The voice of the woman trailed off, as if she were bending among the bushes.

Presently the girl's task was ended. She stood up, wincing as the tired muscles adjusted themselves. She was not tall, but her form had the freedom which an out-door life bestows. Her dress was soiled about the hem with the damp earth in which she had been kneeling; her fingers were smeared with grime and leaf-stain.

Mrs. Frear, a dark-eyed, fresh-cheeked woman, erect and slender, came toward her, stepping carefully among the rows of vegetables. She was carrying a large white bowl of red currants, glowing jewel-like in the sun. "You never stop till you get to the end of a piece of work," said the mother in her gracious voice, which after years in the North still carried a hint of Southern accent.

"No," answered Marian, smiling wearily. "And who is just like me, in that respect?"

"Nobody that I know." Mrs. Frear spoke innocently, ignoring the imputation. "It's my turn to get supper. I'll take some of the carrots; they're so tender, they'll cook in a few minutes. It won't do to waste them." She lifted a bunch of the young carrots and long fronds, and turned toward the

house, holding the bowl of currants against her side to steady it.

"Poor mother!" Marian breathed as she watched the older woman in her odd old-fashioned sacque and shapeless faded sun-bonnet.

"Coming?" The sun-bonnet turned, and the eyes beneath it questioned the girl still standing among the garden-rows.

"In a minute."

Marian threw herself down on the turf under a maple tree beside the fence. The misery and rebellion which she had been crushing in her heart all day now forced themselves to the surface. Tears sprang to her eyes, but she forced them back. "I can't stand it," she murmured, and bowed her head upon her knees; but she raised it again in a moment, lest her mother should look out of the window in the kitchen. Through a blur of tears, the girl studied the gray little house, with its shabby unpainted "upright and lean-to," softened at the back by hop-vines and morning-glories. Her eyes rested on the meager out-buildings, devoid of paint; and then swept the circle of the landscape. "Not another house in sight!" she cried, as if repeating an old grievance. All around were woodland and pasture, broken by hillside fields, where the grain stood ready for the reaping. Behind the garden and across the meadow was the lake, where now shadows were dimming the gleam which all day had lured from among the trees. The loneliness of the situation was complete.

Marian clenched her hands as she sat there in the grass. "I won't cry," she was saying to herself.

Her mother could not bear to see the marks of tears, and besides, Marian had learned the uselessness of crying. "It's so dreadfully shut in," she told herself. "Other girls —" But Marian knew the uselessness of thinking about other girls. She sat brooding, her head against her hand. A cat-bird in the maple assailed her with shrill noises of vexation. A row of white ducks came waddling up from the lake, quacking contentedly to one another after a day of sunshine and fat slugs. Young turkeys engaged in plaintive chat, considering where to sleep. Marian usually loved this hour of the day at the isolated little homestead; but just now her mind was full of its loneliness and stagnation.

Many minutes passed. Then Mrs. Frear's voice sounded from the other side of the house,— "Merry! Mar-i-an!"

"Yes, mother. I'm coming."

The girl rose and took up the carrots which lay drying in the furrow. She went through the little gate into the yard, where plantains and white-flowered may-weed rose thickly under her feet. On the clothes-reel a blue print dress was hanging: when one has few clothes, one washes often.

When Marian came to the stone step at the door of the lean-to kitchen, she had regained her self-control. She suppressed a catch in her voice as she called, "Come, Tootie! Come, puss! puss!" A black-and-white cat with a pink nose came to the screen door and looked out. "Nice Rosy-Nosey!" Marian went in and took the cat into her arms, caressing it while it rubbed against her cheek.

"I couldn't imagine where you'd gone," Mrs.

Frear said, stepping quickly about in her preparations for supper. She gave a keen glance at her daughter, and then went on with her work.

"I was tired. I thought I'd sit a few minutes." Marian put down the cat and went to the sink to scrub the grime from her hands.

On the stove-hearth stood two blue plates holding delicate brown slices of toast. After a hasty look into the oven, Mrs. Frear took up a saucepan, and heaped upon the toast some generous spoonfuls of creamed carrot.

"There's hot corn bread," she remarked as she put down the saucepan.

"Ah, that's good!" Marian tried to look excited and pleased, but succeeded only languidly. She took up the plates, while Mrs. Frear followed with the tea. They both went into the sitting-room at the front of the house. It was a cheerful room, in spite of the poor patched carpet and discolored wall-paper. Perfect order prevailed. There were crisp white curtains of muslin at the windows, and glinting mirrors on the walls. A handsome old mahogany table with carved feet was set out with a bit of white linen and blue Canton ware.

"You'll feel better when you've eaten," said Mrs. Frear, arranging the dishes. Without answering, Marian went to get the corn bread.

The two women sat down and ate almost silently, both attempting to conceal their thoughts. At last the tension broke. "Don't feel so badly, Merry," cried Mrs. Frear in a tone of distress.

"Merry! It's a queer name," answered the girl, choking.

"But you are, sometimes — most of the time." The mother tried to smile.

"I could be all the time, if — if things were different. I suppose I ought to be, anyway," Marian added with self-reproach.

"Things will be different — surely they will." But there was doubt in the older woman's face.

"I don't see how." Marian stared with tired eyes at her heavy silver fork. "What made father leave us here like this?" She took up the fork, and then laid it down again.

"You know. He thought it would be nice for us to come here in the summer, away from everybody." Mrs. Frear paused. "And then when he was gone — when he died — our money was all gone, too, and this was the only place to come to. Marian, you know all this."

"Yes, I do. I'm sorry I spoke as I did, mother." Marian looked ashamed. "But it is too bad that the place is so shut in."

"That was why he — your father — liked it," Mrs. Frear returned. "He'd been worried and busy, and he thought we could be so happy, we three, together, for a little while. He didn't know he was — going."

Marian felt the restrained tremor in her mother's voice. She smiled across the table in an effort to regain the cheerfulness which usually reigned at their meals. "And we have been happy here — we two — all the time, haven't we?" she said. She did not remember her father, except as a vague figure with a dark mustache and kind strong hands.

"Indeed we have," Mrs. Frear responded grate-

fully; " in spite of everything — the hard work, and not having money enough, and the loneliness, and all."

" And we're going to keep on." The girl strove to speak with hearty assurance.

There was silence again. Then Mrs. Frear leaned back in her chair, saying nervously, " You know, I've often told you that if you want to try going out — away — and doing something "— the sweet voice faltered —" I wouldn't put a straw in your way."

" Mother ! " Marian flashed back, " as if I'd leave you ! "

" I could get on."

" Alone — all winter, without even a neighbor's chimney to look at? Darling lady, we needn't talk about it." Marian's eyes showed affectionate rebuke.

" But —"

" I couldn't. And besides," the girl went on with assumed lightness, " what could I do? I've got to learn something first. There isn't anything that I'd be good for."

" You're a very useful young lady, to me."

" I'm afraid I shouldn't be to any one else. The worst is," Marian cried, frowning, " I'm so awfully frightened of people. I'd be afraid to meet any strangers, or to try to do anything." She sat crumbling bits of bread in her unsteady fingers. Then she roused herself. " It's a shame to talk about things like this at the table. Have you finished, mother? I'll get the dessert."

Marian went around the table, and kissed her

mother on the cheek. With deft hands she changed the plates, and brought on glass dishes of freshly washed red currants on the stem, and smaller dishes filled with sugar. There was a plate of white cake on the table.

The woman and the young girl sat dipping the clusters of currants into the sugar, and enjoying their leisure, after a busy day. There was no more reference to the subjects which they had just discussed. Marian was sorry for having brought them up, and Mrs. Frear was glad to let them drop.

After supper, while her mother was washing the few dishes, Marian went out to see that the young chickens and turkeys were safely put to bed. She felt refreshed, and less miserable than she had felt somewhat earlier, but her problem was still aching in her mind.

She let down the bars, and walked through the meadow to the lake. Tall grasses and "black-eyed Susans" brushed against her skirts beside the narrow path. Here and there she tiptoed along planks set into the oozy soil. Red bird-cherries and dark purple June-berries hung from the trees that fringed the water. Marian pushed through the branches and came out upon the shore. She stood still, sighing with joy. The irregular expanse of the lake, with its setting of green oak and pine, was the picture of quiet. Under the branches of a basswood tree, an old unpainted boat rocked slightly in the waves which lapped against the pebbles. Leaning upon the bole of the tree, the girl gave herself up to the spell of the scene and the hour.

All at once she started and looked keenly out into

the shadowy spaces of the lake. "What was that?" she asked herself, aloud. Did she hear voices, young voices, like those of boys and girls,—a laugh, a bit of song? "No, of course not," she added. "It couldn't be. There's no one around here."

There was only one building on the lake, and that was fully a half-mile away, hidden by the curving bank. It was a house which had stood unoccupied for a number of years. An elderly man had built it as a summer home for his wife and himself, but something had happened, and they had never come back.

"I wonder?" Marian listened for the voices. The dusk had settled over the western bank of the lake, where the sky was turning to pale bluish green. "It must have been a loon," the girl whispered. She had a sense of awe of the big birds that bobbed up so startlingly out of the water, and then disappeared with mocking shrieks of laughter.

But no! There it was again — a girl's laugh, not a bird's. Very faintly it rippled along the air, and died out in the lapping of the waves. Marian caught her breath. A long time she stood in the twilight, waiting to hear the laugh again; but it did not come. "But I'm sure I heard it, anyway," she murmured, and was consoled.

When she turned away, she walked with a freer step, and the last weariness of the day had vanished. From the edge of the pasture, she saw that her mother had lighted a lamp in the little house. As she hurried toward the yellow square of the window, there was an eager questioning in her heart. She longed to know whose laughter had come so faintly

yet so certainly to her ears. At the same time, she felt a burst of hope and courage. She was less a prisoner than before. As she ran through the white may-weed, under the first stars, she sang exultantly to herself, " There must be, must be some way out! "

CHAPTER II

THE SPALDINGS

THE next forenoon, Marian was in the kitchen, washing and sorting eggs, and packing them into a crate. Her mind was as busy as her hands. She was thinking about the incident of the evening before, and the elusive sound of laughter upon the lake. "I know I wasn't mistaken," she said to herself.

Just then there was a loud knock at the door. Marian ran to unlatch the screen, calling good-day to the man who stood outside. He was an odd-looking old soul, short and stubby, with a red face, and reddish gray whiskers. His rough clothes and the short pipe held in his teeth made him appear almost like a tramp; but he was in fact a prosperous farmer who lived a mile or so away, on the main road. He had been a good friend to the dwellers in the house beside the lake.

"Good day, little girl," he said gravely, stepping across the threshold. He had an air of solemnity, above a gay and kindly heart. "You must think I'm a sort of a fly, that you lock me out like this."

"You're more of a busy bee than a fly, Mr. Grant," said Marian, with a touch of shyness, though she had known the man since she was a child.

"I'll be bound, you're glad the flies don't go around smoking an evil-smelling pipe." Mr. Grant

took the pipe out of his mouth and regarded it ruefully. "If they did, you'd shut 'em out tighter than ever." He began smoking again, with a quizzical smile.

"It's all right, Mr. Grant. You know we don't mind," Marian replied. "Won't you sit down? The eggs will be ready in just a second." The smell of the pipe was an alien odor in that sweet and clean kitchen.

"Where's your mother?" The old man sat down in an ancient but solid chair with dull painted flowers along its back.

"Out picking currants. That currant conserve sold so well last year that she wants to put up more, this summer." Marian was quickly packing the last of the eggs, and fitting a cover on the crate. "Here's the list of things we want — sugar, coffee, canned salmon, and, oh, yes,— I forgot to put down the baking powder." Mr. Grant took a pencil from his pocket, and she scribbled the last items on the list.

"Eggs have gone up three cents." The old man puffed at his pipe as he spoke. He had driven in from the main road to carry to town anything which the Frears wished to send, and to get the list of what he was to bring back for them. They had no horse, and could reach the village, four miles away, only by walking or by waiting at the roadside and "catching a chance." Once in a month or so, Mr. Grant made a trip to the larger town of Willford, nine miles distant, and he never failed to transact what business he could for the Frears, or to ask them to go along.

"It's awfully kind of you," Marian said, as she always did, trying to express her gratitude to this man who had enabled her mother to make a living by selling the products of the little plot of ground.

"No bother, no bother." Mr. Grant rose to go.

"I know it is, but we couldn't get on without it," the girl responded. "The next time, mother wants to talk to you about the wood. She thinks she'd better order another cord."

"All right. I'll see about it." Grant lifted the crate of eggs, and carried it out to his wagon, while Marian followed with a large basket filled with young carrots, onions, peas, and early corn. Toro, Mr. Grant's dog, was sniffing and growling around the woodpile where Rosy-Nosey had taken refuge, in a state of great disdain. When the things had been stowed away in the back of the light wagon, and the old man had climbed in and taken up the reins, he stopped and looked down at the girl with the air of having forgotten something important. "You'll be having neighbors now," he remarked.

"Oh! Who?" Marian was tense with eagerness.

"Why, they do say some one's come to stay at the Craik place."

Marian flushed. "I thought there might be some one there," she answered. "Who are they, do you know?"

"Some city folks, I hear. Two or three young folks among 'em. I don't suppose they'll be staying long — too dull, probably."

It seemed as if Marian could not let him go.

"You don't know their names, or anything about them?" she inquired wistfully.

"No, not a thing. Carl Erickson told me they'd hired him to haul their stuff from the dee-po at Willford. He was in a hurry, and I didn't get a chance to ask him much. Here, Toro, here! Leave that cat alone."

After Mr. Grant had driven out through the lane, Marian turned back into the house, and cleared away the vestiges of her work with the eggs. She was all wonder and excitement.

So there *were* people at the Craik place! Young people! She had heard their voices. She stood still, with clasped hands, realizing what the news might mean to her. Could she ever get acquainted with them? Or would they keep to themselves? They were city folks. She looked down at her print dress and heavy shoes. Why should they want anything to do with her? she asked herself, between humility and longing. But if, by some miracle, they should, how beautiful it would be! With timid ecstasy she stood dreaming beside the kitchen table.

It was nearing noon, and presently her mother came in with a pail of currants. "Well," she said pleasantly, "Mr. Grant was here, wasn't he? I didn't notice until I saw him driving away. I can smell his pipe yet."

"Yes." Marian, in an absent way, began getting out the dishes for lunch. "Eggs have gone up three cents. I told him about the wood. But, oh, mother, what — *what* do you think has happened?"

"I can't imagine." Mrs. Frear was emptying

the currants into a gray earthen crock. Rather startled, she looked over her shoulder to discern the cause of the excitement in Marian's voice.

"Mr. Grant says there's a family staying at the Craik place." The girl paused with a blue cup in each hand.

"Well, that *is* good news!" Mrs. Frear finished emptying the currants. "It will be splendid to know that the house isn't shut up any more."

"Yes, won't it? The windows always looked so gloomy when we rowed past."

"Who are the people? Did he say?"

"He doesn't know, except that they're 'some city folks.' Carl Erickson hauled their goods from Willford." Marian was mechanically going on with the preparations for lunch.

Mrs. Frear began washing some lettuce which she had brought in. "I dare say we sha'n't see much of them," she said thoughtfully.

"N-no," Marian responded from the cupboard, where she was reaching for the glasses. "But I'd hoped —"

"I shouldn't count too much on it, Merry, dear." Mrs. Frear's voice was very even. "It's away down the lake, and they may be wrapped up in their own affairs. But of course — we don't know —" The mother spoke with the evident intention of guarding her daughter against disappointment. "We'll just have to let things take their course."

"Yes, I know. And I suppose I should be scared to death of them if they did pay any attention to us." Marian was subdued, remembering her own great

fault of shyness. "But you're good enough to associate with any one, mother." She raised her voice above the splash of water in the sink.

"We're both good enough," said the older woman calmly. "I was only saying that we might not see them at all. Wouldn't you like my old-fashioned hot dressing on the lettuce to-day?"

"Yes. That would be a change." Marian fell silent. Of course, the newcomers might not care to concern themselves with outsiders. But at any rate, she could row past the house and see them, and they would be out on the lake in a boat. They would have interesting clothes, and "different" ways, and bring in a glimpse of the real world. That was something not to be despised.

Marian was sixteen. It was two years since she had stopped going to the district school, a mile and a half away across the fields. The teachers were mostly Danish girls who had had a little training at a county school but whose speech and manners were scarcely better than those of their pupils,— children of Danish farmers and dairymen. In her last years at school, Marian had felt out of place among the boys and girls; and the teachers had either told her frankly that they had no more to give her, or they had been irritated by her "finicky" ways of speaking and acting. Now the problem of her education had become acute. Was she to stay here always, without any opportunity for learning? There seemed to be no way of getting out, to a place where the right kind of schooling would be at hand.

After lunch, when the dishes had been put away, Mrs. Frear took a duster and went to give an extra

glow of perfection to the neatness of the living-room. She was wiping an invisible speck from an old silver-luster pitcher on the mantel, when Marian said from the kitchen door, "That's absolutely clean, mother. What's the use of doing things so perfectly? There's no one to see it." Despondency was still heavy at her heart.

Mrs. Frear turned with the cloth in her hand. "Why, you see it. I see it. Aren't we any one?"

"I suppose so. But we might stand things if they weren't done so carefully."

"We shouldn't be satisfied. I can't bear to see a house kept badly. Things must be *right*, you know, dear."

"I didn't exactly mean that they should be kept badly." Marian was taking off her kitchen apron. "You love to fuss over them, don't you? How you'd love a big beautiful house to keep, mother!"

Mrs. Frear moved a candlestick on the shelf. "Yes, I would," she sighed,—"the kind I grew up in, with plenty of space, and lovely old furniture, and quantities of china and linen." She paused for a moment. "But the best I can do is to keep this little place just as perfectly as if it were larger and more beautiful."

"Sometime we'll have the kind you want," Marian predicted. "We live on *sometime's*, don't we?"

"They're wholesome things." Mrs. Frear went on with her dusting, but her brown eyes were sad as they followed Marian's movements in the kitchen.

That afternoon something unusual happened. Marian had finished a particular task of weeding,

and before beginning another, she stole down to the lake, as she sometimes did in the intervals of work. As she neared the fringe of trees about the shore, she heard voices not very far away. "The new people!" she whispered, uncertain whether to turn around or to go on. Curiosity which she could not resist drew her to the bass-wood tree beside the narrow landing-place. Pulling back the branches, she peeped out. At no great distance was a row-boat, smartly painted in white and blue, bearing the name *Paloma* along the bow. In the boat were a young man of about eighteen, and a girl somewhat younger, perhaps fifteen. The boy sat in the stern, with a fishpole, and was baiting his hook. The girl sat on the middle seat holding the boat in place by unskilled motions of the oars.

"This ought to be a good place for perch," the youth was saying. "I shan't dare to go home without any, after the way I boasted to Aunt Elsie."

The girl was looking down into the water. "Oh, there are some big ones!" she cried. "Look! they're just scudding past, like shadows."

Marian longed to call out that those "big ones" were only red-horse, not fit for eating; and that the place for perch was at the west side of the lake, where a stream flowed in, beside the tamarack swamp. But she did not dare to let herself be known.

She stood absorbed, staring at the pair in the boat. The boy was in corduroy trousers and a much-worn white silk shirt, open at the neck. The girl wore a short skirt and a middy-blouse, with a great red silk scarf knotted below the collar. She had dark curl-

ing hair and a somber face. Her voice was fresh and distinctive, with a sort of easy drawl.

"I'll tell you what," she began, "if you're going to fish here, you can put me ashore, and I'll go up to that house that we can see the chimney of. Aunt Elsie said she relied on me to scare up something for supper. Maybe we can buy something there."

The boy was watching his "bob," and did not move or answer. Instead, he began to hum a bar of a lively song .

"Listen, Harvey," cried the girl impatiently. "I know you heard what I said. I want to go ashore."

"All right, Ag," replied the boy lazily. "But aren't you afraid that the bogies'll get you?"

"Harvey Spalding, don't call me Ag," the girl burst out. "It's horrible. Agnes is bad enough, but *Ag—!*" She paused eloquently, her face flushed with injured dignity. "I've told you a dozen times how I feel about it."

The boy laughed, throwing his light hair back from his forehead. "Just as you like, Sister. Agnes it is. But are you sure you want to wander on an unknown shore?"

"I'm not afraid," was the response. "That Carl Erickson said that there were only two women living there."

The boy jerked at his line. "They might have a dog," he said tantalizingly,—"a huge dog, with a large red mouth and long teeth,— the kind of dog that comes bounding out at you, barking and growling like mad,—"

"I'm not afraid of dogs, Harve," said Agnes.

"Don't call me *Harve!*" The boy shook his

shoulders, giving an exaggerated imitation of his sister's voice and manner, so apt that Agnes laughed in spite of herself. Marian smiled too, detecting the friendly companionship under the bantering words.

"Well, *Harvey,* then. Come on, now. I'm going to row ashore."

"Oh, wait! wait just a minute. I thought I had a bite," the boy protested. Then with an entire change to seriousness he said, looking over at his sister, "Don't you honestly want me to go with you, Agnes? I'd just as lief, you know."

"No, of course not," Agnes answered in the same earnest tone. "I'd rather go alone. You can stay here and fish from the end of the boat while I'm gone."

Marian had been so fascinated by the strangers and their lively conversation that she had forgotten that she was eavesdropping. Now she wakened to that fact, and to the realization that she must take refuge in flight or meet these young people face to face on the shore. A great wave of shyness swept over her. She could not meet them, in spite of their free and friendly looks.

"I'll have to run for the house," she murmured. Swiftly she sped through the bushes, and up the narrow path, treading on ferns and purple iris, and bending black-eyed Susans in the grass. She ran reluctantly, for all her haste. She longed to keep on looking at the blue and white *Paloma* (what did the name mean?), and study the two invaders from the outer world.

She heard the creak of oars as the boat moved toward the landing-beach. In another minute she

had reached the house, and was fumbling at the knob of the screen door. She found her mother at the kneading-board in the kitchen, beside the widow where the grapevine swung. "Mother," she said breathlessly, "those people from the Craik place — they're down at the landing, and they're coming up here. One of them is, anyway — a girl."

"I'm glad to hear it." Mrs. Frear was shaping a roll, with delicate touch. "Did you talk with them, Marian?"

"No. I just looked through the branches of the bass-wood tree. There they were, out in a boat, and I heard what they were saying. I couldn't help it, mother. I didn't mean to eavesdrop. But she's coming up, right away. I think she wants to buy something out of the garden, or maybe eggs, or milk."

"I hope so," Mrs. Frear replied. "It would be a great help to us if they were to buy regularly while they're here." She stood thoughtfully, holding the last bit of dough in her fingers.

"Mother," said Marian desperately, "I can't meet that girl. I'm so afraid of her. She's so — I don't know how to say it. I'm going into the winter kitchen."

"Oh, Merry, dear," cried Mrs. Frear appealingly, "don't do that. She's nothing but a young girl like yourself. You might find it very pleasant to know her."

"I can't." The stubborn words were softened by the look of shyness and humiliation on Marian's face.

Mrs. Frear sighed. "Just as you like, child,"

she answered. "But I wish you'd be more sensible."

"Maybe I shall, sometime."

A step had sounded on the boards that led up to the stone door-step. Marian ran into the living-room, and shut herself into the small room at the end of the upright, which was used for a kitchen in the coldest weather. Just now it was a store-room for egg crates, berry boxes, fruit cans, and unused utensils. The hinge had sprung a trifle, so that the door did not close tightly; Marian hesitated to push it hard, lest it should creak. She stood in the middle of the floor, heartily ashamed of her foolishness, and yet powerless to act in any other way.

She heard a knock at the kitchen screen, and her mother's gracious voice saying, "Good afternoon."

Then came the high fresh voice of the girl: "We heard that we might be able to get some eggs and vegetables here. Could you sell us some? My family are staying further down the lake, at what's called the Craik place."

Marian envied the direct fearless manner of this girl, younger than herself, yet used to going about and being among people.

"Why, yes, I think we can let you have something," said Mrs. Frear easily. "Come right in."

The screen door squeaked as the girl entered the kitchen. Marian heard the placing of a chair, and the words — "two dozen eggs, please — oh, what a dear pussy!" She heard a scramble for the cat and "What's its name?"

"Rosy-Nosey — otherwise Tootie," said Mrs. Frear. "We're very fond of her. She won't hurt you."

Marian perceived that the girl had taken Tootie into her arms, and was murmuring to the puss. "I'm glad she likes cats," thought the fugitive in the store room. "She must be all right if she does." Marian caught a few words here and there,—"lettuce, and young onions, and —"

"I'm afraid we can let you have only a dozen eggs," Mrs. Frear was saying. "We sent all we had to the store, and kept these for ourselves."

"Oh, can you spare them?" the stranger asked quickly.

"Yes, of course."

"We'll get more next time."

Next time! "I'm in for it," thought Marian. "How silly it was of me to run away like this!"

"I have only currants picked. Will they do?" Mrs. Frear asked.

"Yes, I think so. Oh, let me taste them. Goodness! but they're sour, aren't they?" The girl's voice carried clearly through the sitting-room and into Marian's retreat.

"Won't you come out to the garden while I get the lettuce and other things?" said Mrs. Frear. "Wait till I put on my sunbonnet."

"That awful thing!" Marian groaned inwardly, remembering the grotesque appearance of the limp and faded bonnet.

"And you might tell your mother —" Mrs. Frear continued, as she and the girl stood at the kitchen door.

"It's my aunt," answered Agnes Spalding hastily. "My mother isn't — living." Her voice softened as she spoke.

"Oh, I'm so sorry." There was a pause. "Well, tell your aunt that I can send over three quarts of raspberries to-morrow morning, and anything else —" The door squeaked as the two went out toward the garden.

Marian opened the door of her cell and stepped into the living-room. The old gilt-framed mirror on the opposite wall showed her cheeks crimson with vexation and shame. Her flight from the strangers was of no avail. She was to be "sent" over to them with three quarts of raspberries, a kind of delivery-girl to these rich campers. "I ought to be glad to help mother in that way," she said, her lip trembling, "and yet it does seem hard — when I'm so frightened of everybody, too!"

She busied herself with the mixing-board, and set the rolls to rise. She felt that she ought to go and assist with what was going on in the garden, but she could not bring herself to burst in now, when she had deliberately hidden from the newcomer. A few tears dropped down on her blue dress.

It seemed a long time until Mrs. Frear came back into the kitchen. She laid some money on the table, and began to wash her hands. Her sunbonnet was pushed back, disclosing her fresh red cheeks, and calm firm chin. She took no notice of Marian's downcast look.

"She's a nice simple girl," Mrs. Frear remarked. "She has a sister and a brother older than she is. Their aunt is chaperoning them, and they have a maid to do the cooking. I should think they'd be very comfortable. Their name is Spalding," she added, reaching for the towel.

Marian was putting wood into the stove, to heat the oven. Her face was averted, and she did not feel that she had anything to say.

CHAPTER III

PIGEON'S NEST

IT was after eight o'clock on the following morning. Marian Frear, rowing down the lake, dipped her oars sternly into the blue crystal of the water. There was a fresh breeze which moderated the heat. The waves slapped coolly against the boat, and a feather of white spume flashed from the oars as they rose and fell.

Marian wore a clean blue dress and a white collar. Her hair was braided more tightly than ever, to keep it from flying, for she wore no hat. "I might as well get it over," murmured the girl, as she threw her shoulders back to the motion of rowing. "Might — as well — get it — o-ver," echoed the waves, striking the sides of the old unpainted boat.

Marian noted that the smoke from the home chimney was hidden among the trees. The shore swung past her — sloping banks, brown and slippery with the pine needles dropped from the great pines that crowded down the hill; then solid masses of dark green foliage, with lighter spaces of bass-wood. Now and then she passed sandy shallows, sprinkled with rushes and lily-pads, and an occasional yellow lily.

Her mood had softened from that of the day before. She did not dread the ordeal quite so much as she expected. She was almost glad of the oppor-

tunity to dispose of the fruit and vegetables which had cost her and her mother so many hours of hard work. It would be wrong to let the chance go by, she thought. But she wished she didn't have to face a crowd of strangers. "Perhaps I shan't see them all at once," she consoled herself.

All too soon the newly-repaired dock at the Spaldings' cottage loomed out of the bright water. Tied to a post was the *Paloma,* swaying gently on her rope. Nailed to a tree at the foot of the bank was a board on which was painted in blue and black letters: *Pigeon's Nest.* "I suppose that's what they call their cottage," meditated Marian. "I wonder why?" It seemed rather odd and foolish to give a name to a house in the woods.

Gathering her courage, Marian tethered her boat, took out the provisions which she had brought, and climbed the hill, following the zig-zag course of the steps improvised of boards and rocks. As she ascended, she heard voices and laughter; and when she reached the top, she saw that the Spaldings were having breakfast on the screened porch. To Marian, it seemed as if there were dozens of people clustered around the table. As a matter of fact, there were only four: Agnes and Harvey, whom she had already seen; the other sister, older than Agnes but younger than Harvey; and the aunt who was chaperoning them, a handsome blond-haired woman in the late thirties.

Marian stood hesitating at the brow of the hill, with her pail of berries and her basket of peas in her hands. Agnes, the first to spy her, called out shrilly, "Oh, here come the raspberries, Auntie!"

They all turned and gazed out through the wire screen at the shrinking delivery-girl, who felt as if a hundred eyes were directed at her. "She acts as if the raspberries had swum here by themselves," she thought, between annoyance and humor. Aloud she said, looking at Agnes, "Mrs. Frear sent these over, as she said she would."

The boy leaped up and came down the steps. "Let me take those things," he said, and lifted the pail and the basket from her.

"Come in," called "Auntie," turning from her place at the head of the table. "It's no end good of you to bring us the berries. Harvey, ask Barbara to empty the pail. Come on in," she urged, as Marian approached the door.

With awkward reluctance, but with inward eagerness, too, Marian stepped into the screened enclosure of the porch. Harvey had carried the berries and peas into the house. The young girl who was a bit older than Marian rose and came forward in a friendly way. She was slender and pretty, with light brown hair and blue-gray eyes. She wore a loose belted dress of pongee silk, with a blue frilled collar. "Sit down," she said cordially. "You must be tired with the long row down the lake."

"Oh, no," Marian stammered in surprise. "I'm used to it. It doesn't tire me." She sat down on a cushioned bench, and the other girl went back to her place at the table. The group of people had now reduced themselves to the normal number. Marian glanced shyly at the cream-colored crash table-cover and the clear glass vase holding grasses and black-eyed Susans. The dishes on the table

were of dull blue, with here and there a plate or a bowl of deep yellow. Marian had never seen such dishes before.

"Won't you have a cup of coffee?" asked the aunt, over her shoulder, shaking back the filmy sleeve of a pink silk negligee, and reaching for the coffee-pot.

"No — no, thank you," Marian returned with an effort. She longed to drink out of one of the blue cups, and to take a muffin from the yellow plate, but she did not dare. "I had my breakfast before I started," she added, by way of explanation. Agnes, still busy with her breakfast, was staring at her with scarce-concealed curiosity. Marian sat with her eyes lowered to the high French heels of "Auntie's" bronze slippers, under a frilly skirt. She was saved any more protests by the return of Harvey with basket and pail. Some pieces of money lay in the bottom of the basket.

Marian rose, and put out her hands, flushing as she felt the boy's eyes upon her. "We were over your way yesterday," he was saying. "I tried to get some perch, but I only got a few little blue-gills."

"Oh, you should have gone to the mouth of the creek," answered Marian eagerly. She was less shy of this friendly boy than of the others. "That's the place for perch. I always go there for them — right at the mouth of the creek, where the bottom's sandy." She said *creek,* and not *crick,* as so many of the country people did.

"Ho! that's the place?" smiled the boy. "I'm sorry I didn't know it. I got a fearful roasting from my family when I came home with the 'pumpkin

seeds.' I'll go over there as soon as I've finished breakfast. Want to go along, Lola, and Ag?"

"*Ag!*" muttered the younger sister, with her mouth full of muffin.

"Yes, I'd love to, Harvey," answered the older girl, "though I'm not much good at fishing."

Harvey turned to Marian. "Don't you want to wait and ride over in our boat?" he said. "We can tow yours, you know."

Marian wanted dreadfully to do as he suggested; but a fever of shyness dried her tongue and thickened her voice. "I — my mother's expecting me back. I'd better be going — " she answered incoherently.

"It'll only be a minute," remonstrated Harvey.

But she would not stay. In the few steps to the door, she caught a glimpse of the big brick fireplace in the house, bright chintz cushions, a bouquet of ferns and red field lilies. On the round wicker table beside her were illustrated magazines, and books in bright or sober jackets. She could hardly keep her hands from reaching out for them. "If I could only borrow one," she thought. "They wouldn't mind, but I can't ask."

Then she was aware that "Auntie" was speaking to her. "It's good of you to bring the things," the lady smiled, looking up at the girl who stood with her hand on the latch of the door. The eyes of the older woman stopped at Marian's neck. Marian put up her hand as if there were an ant or a grasshopper there. "Why, you have thread lace on your collar," cried the lady impulsively.

"Have I?" Marian spoke in a startled way, very much as if the object of interest had really been a

grasshopper. A thread lace collar on a print dress did not seem to her very extraordinary, but she flushed with confusion as she fumbled for the latch again. Harvey looked puzzled.

"Didn't you know it?" asked "Auntie."

"It's some that my grandmother had," responded the girl, growing more diffident.

"It's charming." The lady's keen eyes appraised the lace, and then rested on the shy face of the girl. "Well, good-by."

"Good-by," called Agnes in an awed tone, as if the thread lace had vanquished a proud spirit.

Lola waved her hand and said "Come again!" with her cordial smile.

As Marian ran down the hill, her mind was whirling. With nervous fingers she untied her boat, which had swung around against the *Paloma*. After she had got in hastily and pushed off, she rowed slowly, half hoping that the others would catch up with her. And as she rowed she thought with intensity of how really kind and friendly and nice the group at "Pigeon's Nest" had been. She knew they had spoken with sincerity when they asked her to drink coffee, to ride in their boat, to come again.

She thought miserably of her stiffness and awkwardness. What must they have thought of her? She shrank from dwelling on the sorry figure she must have cut, stammering and blundering and running away. "I don't suppose they'll try to be nice to me again," she said forlornly. "If I could only have acted as if I appreciated their kindness!"

She turned to the mental contemplation of Lola's pretty dress, with its touches of blue embroidery and

its frilled collar; and the older woman's pale pink breakfast-gown, trimmed with lace and blue bows. As she pulled absently at the oars, halfway down the lake, she saw the three young people come racing down the hill to the dock, and heard their laughter as they leaped into their boat and pushed it off. Harvey and Agnes were rowing. Lola put up a crimson parasol. Fishpoles stuck out at the stern of the boat. The *Paloma* was headed for the mouth of the creek, over at the west. The creak of the oars grew faint, mingled with a catch of song that Harvey was singing, something that Marian had never heard.

"They have nothing to do but enjoy themselves," thought the lonely girl, with a twinge at the heart. A long tiresome piece of weeding awaited her at home.

Mrs. Frear was at the kitchen door as Marian came up the path. "Well," she said, scanning her daughter's face, "how did it go? Was it bad?"

"It was awful." Marion stood on the stone step, her breast heaving. "No, it wasn't really," she admitted. "They were nice to me, and not patronizing or snippy. They asked me to have coffee — they were eating breakfast."

"And did you?"

"No. I wanted to, mother, but I — And they asked me to ride in their boat. They were going for perch where I told them to — over at the mouth of the creek."

"And you didn't?"

"No. I wanted to, but I couldn't. Why couldn't I, mother?"

For a moment the face of the mother showed distress. Then she said calmly, "I suppose it's because you've been so shut off from young people, dear. Now that you have a chance to meet them, you ought to try to get over this sensitiveness."

"Perhaps I shan't have the chance," suggested Marian wretchedly. "I didn't meet them half way."

"Well, if you do, you must forget yourself and be natural."

"It seems natural to me to be unnatural." The girl smiled wanly as she came into the house. "But I will try." As she put away the pail and the basket, she remarked, "They seemed to think it was queer that I had that lace of Grandma's on my collar."

"What lace?" asked Mrs. Frear. "Oh, that. You might have told them," she supplemented with a whimsical look, "that we couldn't afford any other kind."

"The aunt — I don't know what her name is — stared awfully hard at me when she saw it. But she was pleasant, too. I couldn't help liking her."

"I shouldn't bother about the lace," said Mrs. Frear in her sensible way.

"It was the books I wanted," sighed Marian, as she took her weeding tools and started for the garden. All the rest of the morning, she kept thinking about the Spaldings. Where was their father? And what was "Auntie's" name? Why did they call their place "Pigeon's Nest"? She wondered where they lived when they were at home, and whether they went to school. "Of course they do," she thought, jabbing at a weed with her case-knife.

She wished she could have gone fishing with the three young people. It would be cool in the shade of the tamaracks, in the breath of the swamp; through the clear water, one could see the sandy bottom, with its scattering of green moss and twisted lily stems. One could even watch the fish nibbling at the bait, but that seemed rather cruel.

All day the thought of the newcomers was in Marian's mind, but after the first hour it was more dreamy than fretful. In the evening she and her mother walked down to the landing. There was no one in sight upon the lake. On its smooth surface lay the reflection of innumerable small scale-like clouds, golden-pink, with deeper tinges at the edge.

> "'A mackerel sky
> Never goes off and leaves the world dry,'"

quoted Mrs. Frear. And then she added practically, "We must look carefully after the young turkeys to-night."

Marian plucked some of the irises and black-eyed Susans. "See, how this blue and yellow go together," she said, holding off the bouquet and surveying it with a recollection of the Spaldings' breakfast table. Mrs. Frear smiled to see a new animation in her daughter's face.

It did rain the next day, not in torrents, but in a fine quick constant downpour. The air was raw and cold, quite different from the almost oppressive warmth of the day before. Marian, looking out of her window upstairs, noted the weather with some dissatisfaction, partly because she thought of the

new crop of weeds which would spring up, and partly because she disliked the gloom of a day indoors and the disagreeable task of paddling about in the wet attending to various "chores" about the barn and garden. Her mind reverted to the Spaldings. No chance of seeing them to-day, she thought. In spite of the humiliations of the day before, she found, to her own surprise, that she was looking forward to seeing the young people again.

She went down stairs, and found that her mother had already built a fire, and was making coffee. Rosy-Nosey behind the stove was washing her little black-and-white face, occasionally stopping to utter a coaxing mew when she thought of breakfast. Some oatmeal, cooked the night before, was warming on the stove; Marian put some of this with milk into a blue earthenware pie-plate, and gave it to the hungry cat.

"I meant to get up, but the room was so dark that I overslept," she said. "You should have wakened me."

"It's too bad a day to do much," answered Mrs. Frear; "and you had the fire all ready to light, so that was easy. Come. The coffee's ready."

They ate breakfast on a little sewing-table in the kitchen. The room was dull, except for the red coals in the front of the stove, and a scarlet geranium blooming on the window sill. Outside, through the swaying and dripping grapevine, showed the fresh green of the garden, with splashes of color, where flowers bordered the plots of vegetables.

"I like a rainy day because it gives me a chance to do so much in-doors," Mrs. Frear said as they

rose from the table. "I think I'll bake a few things to last over Sunday."

"I'll go out and feed the chickens. There's no use in letting them out, is there?" queried Marian.

"No, they can run in their own yard."

Marian put on her old faded rain-coat with a clumsy cape; a shapeless felt hat; and heavy "storm" rubbers. She could not bother with an umbrella, and so she wore old garments which no amount of rain could injure.

When she stepped out at the kitchen door, there was hardly a living creature in sight. The low gray clouds and drizzling rain cast a blur over the landscape, and dulled the tones of meadow and lake. Under the eaves of the barn, on a box fastened up for a bird-house, some white doves huddled, motionless and noiseless.

Marian went to the chicken-house, which was attached to the barn, and sprinkled corn and oats among the heaps of straw upon the floor. "You'll have to do as the rest of us do — scratch for what you get," she informed the fowls, eying her askance in subdued groups. She opened the door into their wire-enclosed runway, and one or two older hens ventured out, lifting their feet irritably and fluttering their feathers.

As Marian turned away, she heard a disconsolate *peep, peep* from a nook under the edge of the coop. A brown hen was sheltering her brood, arrived unduly late in the season. "Oh, Hannah has come off with her chickens, on a wet day like this!" cried the girl, vexed and amused. It had been impossible to find the hidden nest of the brown hen.

Now she was clucking and bridling apologetically in a half-dry corner, rueing, no doubt, her ill-timed return with her young chicks. She let Marian feel under her for the draggled bits of fluff, which had been trailed through the soaking grass on the way home from the hidden nest. The girl took the wettest of the little creatures into her skirt and carried them to the house.

"What a day for Hannah to choose!" sighed Mrs. Frear, running to the woodshed for a box in which to tuck up the chirping strangers. Soon they were cozily snuggled down under a warm cloth.

Tootie poked an inquiring nose over the edge of the box, as it sat behind the stove. "No, no, Tootie! Those are not for you," admonished Marian, as she pulled the cat gently away. The injured puss went to sit on the window sill, and gaze thoughtfully out into the moist green world; she turned in mild perplexity now and then, when a louder *peep* than usual sounded from the box.

By this time, Marian had gone to milk the cow, too long neglected, and to bring in wood for the day. She drew water, too, from the covered well in the yard, with its two balancing buckets; and she went out and pulled some vegetables in the garden. By this time, she was thoroughly bedraggled and sopping, and in her desire to get everything done as quickly as possible, she had forgotten all about her looks.

When she came in with a basin of new potatoes, she noticed that the board which ran from the eaves of the house into the rain barrel at the corner of the lean-to had slipped out of place, so that the

water was running to the ground. The board had been fastened by a strong wire, which had rusted and broken. Marian took the potatoes into the kitchen, and then came back to the rain barrel. She was struggling to put the heavy plank back into its place when she heard a step on the walk. Looking around hastily, she saw Harvey Spalding standing behind her, dressed in a yellow " slicker " and a gray felt hat.

" Oh! " she cried, and dropped the board clattering upon the barrel.

" It's a wonder that didn't fall on your toes," remarked Harvey by way of greeting.

" I — wasn't expecting to see any one," answered Marian weakly. She was thinking of her strange costume, her draggled skirts and muddy feet and ugly hat.

" The rain means nothing in my young life," smiled Harvey. Marian, not knowing much slang, thought his speech rather queer. " And the folks at home are hungrier on wet days than any other," he went on, " so I came out to provide for the family. Here, I'll attend to that board for you."

He lifted the board and forced it into place, so that the trickle from the eaves found its proper way into the barrel. Then he seized and twisted the wire, making it as firm as it had been before. " There! That'll last for a hundred years," he said with satisfaction.

" Thank you — it's awfully kind," murmured Marian. " I'm a sight — been looking after the chickens." The rain was falling on the two young

people, as they stood smiling at each other, regardless of the weather.

"Lots to do about a place," said the boy cheerfully, and taking no note of the attempted apology. "Well, I wonder what you have for us this morning. Food just melts away, over at Pigeon's Nest."

"Pigeons do have terrific appetites," replied Marian, wondering why she did not feel so shy as she would have expected. "But why do you call your place *that?*"

"It is a trifle silly, isn't it? In the first place, we named our boat the *Paloma* — because we liked the name — and that means *pigeon,* in Spanish, you know."

"N-no, I didn't know; but it's a pretty name," Marian stammered.

"We think so," the boy answered. "And then Auntie's name is an odd one — she's Mrs. Dove. I don't suppose any of us thought to make any introductions when you were over the other day."

"I didn't hear her name." Marian had hardly considered herself a sufficiently important guest to be introduced.

"She's father's sister, you know. Well, as I said, her name is Dove now, and we thought of calling the place Dove Cote, but that sounded sort of sentimental; and sad to say we're not always as harmonious as turtle doves." Harvey laughed, as if he were remembering some diverting family disagreements. "So we compromised on Pigeon's Nest."

"It seems funny to me," Marian confessed. "We might call ours Duck's Nest, or Turkey Lodge,

— only we haven't any turkey relatives." She flushed, surprised that she could speak so naturally; but there was something about Harvey — a kind of simple jollity — which put her at her ease.

Harvey laughed. "Oh, say," he remarked, "I saw your boat down at the landing, half full of water. It ought to be bailed out."

"There's no use till it stops raining," Marian responded. "We've always wished we had a boat-house, but we've never — got around to build one." She hardly liked to say, "We've never been able to afford one."

They had turned toward the kitchen door. "Come in," said the girl, and opened the screen, beginning to feel embarrassed about asking Harvey into the kitchen. She could hardly insist on his taking the roundabout way to the front door, which they hardly ever used.

The room, when the opening of the inner door disclosed it, was rather dark, but warm and sweet-smelling. Mrs. Frear was standing at the table, taking ginger cookies out of a long shallow pan, and laying them on a folded cloth. She looked over her shoulder as the two young people entered.

"Mother, this is Mr. Spalding. You know, his people are living at the Craik place." Marian performed the introduction in a confused voice, and slipped into the other room to take off her wraps and hang them in the winter kitchen. She heard her mother saying, "Oh, yes, I met your sister yesterday, or the day before."

Harvey had taken off his hat, and now stood easily near the door. "Agnes came up the other

day, while I was fishing," he said. "And now I'm here to get some more of those good things that you sent."

Mrs. Frear had disposed of the last of the cookies. "Sit down," she said, "and have one of these. I don't know whether they're good or not." She took down a plate from the cupboard, and put some of the spicy brown cookies on it. "Do have some," she repeated cordially. In her gray print dress and white apron, she looked younger and more attractive than she had looked in the nondescript garments which she wore when at work in the garden.

Harvey, still standing, out of deference to the hostess, took one of the cakes with an eager gesture. "Thank you. I couldn't have stood it if you hadn't asked me," he laughed. "I should have snatched a handful right off the table."

Marian came back into the room, her hair somewhat ruffled with her out-of-door labors, and not so severe as usual. Harvey was munching his cooky, and she accepted one and began eating. Mrs. Frear explained about the chickens, while Harvey bent over to peer at them in their shadowy recess behind the stove.

He turned to Marian as she came in. "I got a lot of perch where you told me to go," he said. "And now I'm going to try fishing in the rain. They say it's a good time for black bass. Do you know where to find any?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, "along the reeds, just off that shallow place that you pass in coming over here. Mr. Grant — a man that lives over on the main road — comes and fishes there quite often.

I've only caught a few black bass. They're too — *gamey,* isn't it? — for me."

"I hope they won't be gamey enough to get away. I'll go after 'em, anyhow. And I've brought along a trolling line and spoon-hook for pickerel. I suppose there are some."

"Yes, big ones," assented Marian, glad to have a subject of conversation on which she knew something. "We have them once in a while. Mother cooks fish to perfection. There's nothing much better than her baked bass or fried pickerel."

"Marian is prejudiced in my favor," said Mrs. Frear; "but it is an art to cook fish well. It must be cooked *enough,* and then a little more." She was sitting, holder in hand, ready to take a look at a tin of cookies in the oven.

"Father will want to know all about the best fishing places," Harvey said, finishing his second ginger snap. "He's coming pretty soon, for a day or two. He's so busy that he can't get up here very often."

"That's too bad, when you're all here together," Mrs. Frear sympathized.

"Yes, he expected to spend at least a month with us, but something came up, and he couldn't do it. So I have to be the man of the family." The boy spoke jestingly, but with a dash of real pride. "One man doesn't have much show in a family-group of three women. If father were here, we might be able to hold our own together."

And so the conversation went on, half seriously, for fifteen minutes. The girl, listening and not saying much, discovered that the Spaldings lived in an Illinois city, not far from Chicago, that the mother

had been dead for six years, and that "Aunt Elsie" had presided over the household for four; during the two intervening years, there had been a succession of "housekeepers," whose varying characteristics Harvey, after an expressive grimace, had left to the imagination of his listeners.

"It's pretty dreadful," thought Marian, "losing their mother just when they needed her the most. No matter how well-to-do they might be, you could never really call them rich." She felt somehow less in awe of the Spaldings after she had heard these details about their family life.

"It was funny, the way we happened to come here," Harvey went on. "It was getting on into the summer, and father had been so busy he hadn't decided what to do, and he met a man on the train — a real estate agent — who told him about a cottage for rent on the Chain of Lakes here, and father got right off the train at Willford and went out and looked at the place, and rented it, and telegraphed us to get ready to come. One day, we'd never heard of it, and the next — or a few days after, to be accurate — we were here."

"I hope you weren't disappointed," said Mrs. Frear.

"I should say not. It was repaired in a hurry, and there's really a lot that ought to be done yet; but we think it's great. The only trouble is that it's lonesome for Aunt Elsie — Mrs. Dove — for she likes bridge-parties and such things; and then of course it isn't very easy for father to get to, but one reason why he liked it was because it was off away from everything."

"Oh, yes, it's off away from everything!" said Marian involuntarily, in a voice which she could not keep from being a bit hard.

Harvey shot her a puzzled glance, and began to talk about the eggs and berries which he had come to get. He went away with a pail of eggs and a burlap bag of "garden stuff," and a pocketful of ginger cookies which Mrs. Frear insisted on his taking.

"He's a nice friendly boy," she said meditatively, standing at the screen door, after he had trudged away in the rain with his "plunder," as he called it. "There's nothing very alarming about him," she added, turning to Marian, who was putting the cookies into a jar.

"It's queer, but I don't feel as afraid of him as I do of the girls," confessed Marian. "Girls are always so critical and disapproving."

"I don't believe these girls are," said Mrs. Frear, going back to her cooking. "They had a nice mother."

"How do you know?" asked Marian. She paused with the cover of the jar in her hand.

"I don't know," her mother replied, "but I'm sure of it just the same. You don't have to be told some things. What do you say to our having cream cake for supper?"

CHAPTER IV

A CAPTIVE FREED

SUNDAY came, with an uncertain mingling of sun and cloud. The young chicks had grown dry and hungry, and were transferred to a little gable-roofed coop with their mother. By the afternoon, the sky had completely cleared, giving assurance that the rain was over.

Marian went down to the landing, to bail out the boat, so that she might take her mother for a ride on the lake. She found that some one had been there before her. The boat had been bailed and swabbed dry, and a row of tall yellow Susans had been stuck about the bow, in a slender bright circle of bloom. The boat swung complacently under the bass-wood tree, the shadows of the flowers coloring the waves. The girl stood astonished, and then a smile of comprehension came. "It's Harvey Spalding. How good of him!"

The quiet courtesy of the act was something new and interesting to her. She had never known any boys who would have thought to do that sort of thing.

On Monday afternoon he came swinging up the path from the lake. He and Marian greeted each other like old friends. "Thank you for bailing the boat," said Marian quickly.

"Oh, the water-sprites did that," the boy replied, "but you're welcome, just the same."

And then he did what was to Marian a very surprising thing. After the business of "providing for the family" had been concluded, he turned to Marian, saying easily, "Don't you want to go up the creek with me? I thought I'd take a little excursion up there before I went home."

Marian looked startled. "Now?" she asked. "But what about the 'plunder'?"

"There's no hurry about it. They don't need it this minute. Can you spare the time to go? I know you're busy."

"Why, I can spare the time, I think," said the girl shyly. "Is it all right, mother? Will you let things go till I come back?"

"Yes, of course it's all right. It will do you good. And I'll promise not to be too strenuous."

"Come on, then," said Harvey, picking up his basket of vegetables. "Good-by, Mrs. Frear. Don't expect her till she arrives."

Marian felt fluttered at the idea of taking this little excursion with Harvey, even though she had lost a good deal of the self-consciousness which had hampered her at first. They walked down through the meadow to the landing, saying very little. Harvey was singing under his breath a negro song familiar to Marian:

"I went down to the ribber, but I couldn't get across,—
Took a little row down Jordan."

He was still humming when he untied the boat:

"Shine on, shine on, O Jerusalem!"

Marian felt a thrill of excitement as she stepped into the *Paloma,* and sank into the broad seat at the stern. Harvey tossed down his hat, and took up the oars, having stowed away the basket in the bow. "Wonderful weather after the rain," he remarked. "A lot cooler than it was."

Marian assented. And then she said, "It seems odd to be sitting back, doing nothing. I usually do the rowing myself. I go out alone a good deal, and then of course I take mother out, too."

"It'll be good for you to watch some other fellow work, then," replied the boy gayly, as he guided the boat through the shallows. "And how's the land army?" he asked, as the *Paloma* took her flight into bluer waters.

"If you mean me,—" hesitated Marian, "I'm all right. I've been working pretty hard lately."

"You certainly do keep at it," Harvey responded. "Don't you get tired?"

"Oh, sometimes." Marian felt afraid that she was going to be pitied, and above all things she shrank at that moment from commiseration. "But I don't mind very much,— the work, you know. I like the garden, and being out-doors."

"I don't mind work, either," Harvey answered, as if he were confiding to her some peculiarity of temperament which she shared. "And anyhow," he went on, pulling steadily at the oars, "a person with any gumption wants to be doing something, instead of being fed with a spoon."

Marian watched the water trickling from the tips of the oars, as they rose and fell in rhythm. "I'm glad I have work to do," she said slowly. "That

isn't what worries me. It's only —" She did not finish, for she felt that she knew this boy too little to tell him her longings and perplexities.

Harvey waited until he saw that she was not going on. "I'm looking forward to a year of hard work, myself," he said frankly.

"Oh, are you?" Marian looked surprised. Somehow, she had not thought of the Spaldings as interested in anything but amusing themselves.

"Yes, even harder than last year. I've finished one year at Arden Institute, you know."

"No, I hadn't heard." Arden Institute Marian knew vaguely as a large technical school in Chicago.

"And this next year," the young man continued, "I'm going to dig in like mad. No idle hours for little Henry!"

"Studying what?" she asked with interest.

"Chemistry, chiefly,— though there are a lot of other things that I can't keep my fingers off. There's a great opportunity for chemists and other scientists, now, you know." His blue eyes sparkled with enthusiasm as he spoke of his ambitions.

"I suppose so." Marian had never thought much about the things in question.

Harvey was going on, as if he did not mind her short bewildered answers. "I worked so hard last year that I got a good start. They gave me a job, too, so that I'm going to be a full-sized wage-earner." His flippant words concealed a pardonable satisfaction.

Marian was surprised again. Her picture of the Spaldings had included a superb indifference to

money, because there was plenty at command. "How do you mean?" she faltered.

Harvey stopped rowing, and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. "Not so horribly cool, after all," he interpolated. Then he followed up his previous remarks. "Why, I'm to look after the laboratory that I work in — kind of student assistant, you know. I'm to see that things are put back in their places, bottles filled, test-tubes and beakers and rubber tubes and such things on hand — alcohol for the alcohol lamps — all that sort of thing. Saves the prof's time and energy, and you can't trust janitors to have things right."

"It must be splendid to have a position like that," glowed the girl. She did not like to say *job,* lest it sound unappreciative.

"A fellow learns a lot by just nosing around in the lab," Harvey explained. "Then I like the idea of getting that much nearer to independence." He glanced inquiringly at Marian, to see whether she accepted his view. "Father has always said I could have what I needed, but he likes to see me doing something for myself. I think a young fellow should earn what he can on his own account. Don't you?"

"Well, yes, I do," said Marian, who had not yet recovered from her surprise. "But I didn't suppose —" She hardly knew how to go on.

"That any one worked who didn't have to?" asked Harvey quizzically.

"Maybe that's what I meant," confessed Marian, flushing.

"Well, they do. I know a lot of fellows whose

fathers are well off, and they (the fellows, I mean) have jobs of some sort. One of 'em keeps books for a delicatessen man; one collects for a grocery firm; and one of 'em typewrites theses for the seniors. Then there are one or two that have work in the Registrar's office, or around the school."

"I think that's wonderful," chorused Marian. "And do the girls do that sort of thing, too?" she inquired dubiously.

"Loads of them," returned Harvey, with extravagance. "That is, you know, Arden isn't a girls' school; but in other schools they do — work to earn money, I mean. Why, even in the high school where I went — where Lola and Agnes go now — there were girls who earned money in lots of ways. Most of them were girls who needed the money, but some of them weren't. Some of them had the 'new woman' idea of being independent."

Marian fell silent. All this was so new to her that she wanted to think it over. She didn't know that young people in towns — young people who had had a "chance," as she would have put it — entertained ideas like that.

Harvey was singing to himself in his habitual way,

> "Shine on, shine on,
> Took a little row down Jordan,
> Shine on, shine on, O Jerusalem!"

They had now approached the mouth of the creek, and with only a brief word or two about the scene, they entered the space where the stream flowed into the lake, beside the tamarack swamp. The girl loved this spot, where the still shadows lurked even

at noon, where marsh grasses waved and multitudes of flowers grew, and golden fishes darted and sang like yellow flecks of light and music.

"Some place!" The boy's slangy words expressed his real delight.

"I'm awfully fond of it," said Marian with an effort. "Lots of times, when I'm lonesome and tired, I come over here and sit in the boat, and it — it's company, in a way — the birds, and all," she finished lamely.

"I know. You must be lonesome here sometimes." The young man spoke with a slow surprise, as if he had not thought of this aspect of things before.

"Dreadfully!" The girl's voice shook in spite of her attempt to control it.

Harvey gave her a quick glance of comprehension, but said nothing in reply. He rowed slowly up the wide mouth of the creek, where white water-flowers sprinkled the still, dark surface, and water-spiders sprawled and wavered in the sun. A great bird rose up with a splash and flew swiftly up the course of the stream, disappearing among the foliage. "What's that?" asked Harvey.

"A sand-hill crane," his companion answered. "There's usually one in the marsh, here, hunting for frogs."

The creek grew narrower, and the boat glided closer to the shore. Clumps of pink-and-white lady-slippers had sprung up here, their exquisite bells lighting up the green shadows below the tamaracks. In the more open spaces, red-winged blackbirds hung on slender stems and sang.

"The banks here are too marshy and miry for landing," Marian explained. "Farther up, they're more solid, but it's hard poling the boat; there are so many turnings, and the water is shallow in some places and deep in others, and then there are logs and fallen branches."

"We'll try it, anyhow," the youth answered.

But they were not to go much farther that day. "What is that queer fluttering over there?" asked Marian, when they had rowed on for a few minutes.

They were puzzled to note a disturbance among the rushes at the side of the stream, where it began to merge into the lake. The bank showed bright green reeds, bordered by the delicate lavender of lobelia. Harvey half rose in the boat. "It's a bird or a duck or something, flapping its wings," he said. "I wonder why it doesn't fly, if it's going to."

"Perhaps it's afraid of us," ventured Marian, "but if it is, why doesn't it take to its wings?"

The flapping and fluttering continued, with a faint spatter of water and a stifled cry from the bird.

"We'll see what's doing," said Harvey, taking up the oars again. "We mustn't pass up an adventure like this."

He rowed quietly over to the edge of the stream, where the water was shallow and muddy, and tufted with hummocks of turf, from which waved sedges and arrow-flowers. Harvey, looking over his shoulder as he rowed, and Marian rising in her seat, saw the brown feathers of a bird moving upon one of the larger hummocks.

"It's a mud-hen," said Marian curiously. "What in the world can be the matter with it?"

Harvey pushed the boat nearer. "It's caught by the foot," he exclaimed.

The struggles of the bird grew wilder as the boat approached. "Probably a big turtle has hold of its leg." Marian stretched herself up to get a better view of the creature, among the grasses and blossoms.

"Well, then, Mr. Turtle will have to give up his drumstick." Harvey pushed the boat up as near as he could. "Can't get it close enough," he said, frowning; the hummocks, made up of roots and earth, were too close together for the boat to go through. "You'd think the turtle would let go, wouldn't you?"

"I don't believe it's a turtle, after all," murmured the girl. She half rose again, holding to the side of the seat. "No — look! it's a vine or something that the poor thing has got her foot tangled up in. You take a look at it."

Harvey peered over the sedges. The bird gave a piteous flutter, and strained its wings and body in a terrified attempt to get away from this new peril. "I see," the boy remarked; "her leg is caught in a curling vine, probably too strong to break."

"That's it, I'm sure," said Marian.

"'What to do?' as the French grammar says," meditated Harvey. "I can't get near enough to reach, and I dare not wade: that mud may be five or six feet deep." He poked an oar into the sediment and mire.

"Yes, yes, it probably is," said Marian anxiously. "Don't try it."

Harvey looked at her, his blue eyes frankly dis-

tressed. "We can't go away and leave the thing to die."

"I should say not," Marian returned excitedly.

The bird had subsided, panting. They could see its head turning this way and that, its eyes gleaming feverishly, as it sought some way of escape.

Harvey sat staring at the shore. "I couldn't sleep to-night, if I had to think of the poor creature fluttering here, or being snatched by a weasel, without a chance for its life."

His companion was waiting for him to decide what to do. She did not feel like urging him to anything; for she knew better than he that the quagmires were too dangerous to be regarded lightly. "You must be careful, whatever you do," she warned.

"I will. But I must do something. There's a place where I think I can get the boat near enough to the shore so that I can jump out."

"And what are you going to do then?"

"Go along the shore till I get somewhere near to the prisoner," the boy said briefly.

"But even then you can't reach her," objected Marian. "It's a long way across the soft ground."

"I can do my possible, to quote French again," said Harvey. He gave her a quick look. "You won't worry and squeal, will you? But you aren't that kind."

"No, I won't squeal," was the reply; "but I hope you'll be careful. You understand,— it's springy all along here; the marsh is undermined. And the mud is bottomless in places."

"I understand." The oarsman was rowing to the one place near, in which the ground was solid

enough to sustain him. He leaped lightly ashore from the bow of the boat.

"Can I help you?" queried Marian.

"No, thanks. One can work better at this game. You can be spectator, and encourage the acrobats. And you'll have to be patient. It may take me quite a while."

"I don't mind." Marian did not see exactly what he was going to do. She pushed the boat into the stream and nearer the bird, for she had some idea of being at hand in case of need.

The rescuer walked back into the tamarack swamp and picked up an armful of fallen boughs, most of them long and rather thick. Then he went to the tussocks of grass between the swamp and the place where the bird lay. Very cautiously, he tried the hummocks, some of which were too small for a foothold. Marian followed his motions earnestly. He went back and hung his watch and fob upon a branch of a tree, and divested himself of his coat. Then he returned to his work, taking the armful of boughs, and laying them side by side among the more solid patches of ground. He brought more boughs, and still more, until he had a rude path of them. Then he broke off branches from the tamarack trees, gathered armfuls of twigs and underbrush, and laid them over the stronger boughs, to give a footing. The girl in the boat frowned heavily. Would it hold? One could scarcely tell.

Harvey took off his shoes, and stood measuring the distance across his highway to a bit of solid earth. Marian held her breath. With a short run, he bounded lightly across the space which he had

bridged, hardly touching the layer of branches and stem. He was on the larger hummock, but still too far away to reach the bird, even with the most serpentine stretchings.

The captive had now ceased to struggle, and lay palpitating, evidently resigned to its end. Harvey began to pull up his bridge and laboriously to transfer it to the other side. It was tiresome work. Sweat gathered on his forehead, but he dashed it away. Not a word was exchanged between him and Marian. He worked swiftly but carefully, fitting the boughs together, the heavier poles below, the mass of underbrush on top. Now and again he tested the bridge with his foot.

Marian moved nervously in the boat. For a moment, fear came over her. If he should slip down into the miry depths, the situation would be serious. He might be able to pull himself out, or she might be able to help him with an oar, or the jelly-like mud might not be so deep in that particular spot as it was in others,— but you couldn't actually count on anything. She clutched the oar with straining fingers.

The boy was absorbed in his task. When he had finished, he stood up, and gave her a clear look, with a bright, reassuring smile. He was a straight, slim figure posed within the shadow which lay across the bank, the light touching his head and shoulders. Marian smiled back at him. Then without any apparent preparation, except the narrowing of his eyes to a keen line, he took a flying leap across the slender bridge, merely touching it with his toes. Almost instantaneously, he was crouching on the hummock

where the bird was lying. It gave a despairing flutter and squawk as he knelt beside it. Very gently he loosed its foot from the entangling tendrils of the vine, bending to examine the exhausted creature for any concealed injury.

"All right; nothing broken!" he called exultantly.

"I'm so glad." Marian's voice was steady and joyful.

The bird lay wearily on its side, its bright eye upturned to the boy. At last, gathering strength from hope, it rose to its feet, stretched its wings, faltered, and then flew away in a low stumbling flight to the edge of the swamp.

The two young people watched it with happiness in their hearts. Marian waved her hand as the bird disappeared.

"Good-by, and better luck!" called Harvey, from his narrow island.

The rescue accomplished, the rescuer turned his attention to the problem of getting back to solid land. With a swift motion, he leaped across his improvised bridge; but now came the trying process of transferring its crude materials from the next hummock to the shore. He seemed longer about the work than he had been at first, more cautious and less certain. Finally he stood ready for the last trial. Marian held her breath. She saw the hummock quiver with the long strain which had been put upon it. It began to give. Harvey leaped, without the chance to measure his effort. He slipped, tottered, swayed. Marian's heart was in her mouth. Harvey threw out his arms, recovered himself, and plunged forward to the solid bank. As he sprang, his feet slipped,

and one leg went deep into the oozy mire. His hands grasped at the small bushes and turf, and he pulled himself out, falling headlong on the grass.

Marian found herself standing up in the boat. She sat down quickly when she saw that he was safe.

With a laugh, the boy scrambled up. The side of his face was scratched by briers; the sleeve of his shirt was torn across in several places. He made a sorry sight, with his muddy leg and dripping foot. Marian laughed hysterically at his gesture and grimace.

"I'm a regular black-leg," said Harvey, endeavoring to wipe off the mud with handfuls of grass. Very calmly he took off his stocking, went and rinsed it in the water, wrung it as dry as he could, and put it on. Then he put on his shoes, donned his coat, and took his watch from the tamarack bough where he had hung it. "We've been at this job quite a while," he called as he put his watch back into his pocket. "But the time was well spent — eh?"

"I should say!" Marian now brought the boat up to the shore, and Harvey got in. He stood in the bow, looking about for a sight of the bird, but it was lost to view in the swamp.

"You're a brick not to yowl and take on," he said. "Some girls would have been squealing their heads off. But I couldn't have done anything if you hadn't kept still."

"I know," said the girl eagerly. "Once or twice I nearly screeched, but I knew it would be fatal if I did."

"Well, this has been a nice little adventure to vary the monotony of things." Harvey sat down wearily

on the seat in the bow. "All the same, I hope the marsh-hens won't get the habit of winding themselves up in wild bean vines whenever I come this way. I don't mind rescuing three or four, but I draw the line at a flock of 'em."

"I don't think it'll happen every day," laughed Marian. She felt exhilarated, now that the worry was over.

"We'd better put for home, or our relatives will think we've gone overboard, sure," sighed Harvey. "We'll change seats — or rather, you'll sit in the stern. I'll do the rowing now."

"Mayn't I do it? You're tired with your life-saving work," protested the girl. "You know I'm used to rowing."

"No, indeed. I row the *Paloma,*" said Harvey in a decisive tone. Marian obediently gave up the oars and took the seat in the stern. After all, it was a luxury to be conveyed over the waters with no exertion, and she couldn't wrangle about it with this firm young man. The shadows of the shore had grown long, across the blue lake, and the afternoon had come close to ending. The two young people were quiet as they made their way back to the Frears' landing. But they had begun to feel as if they had known each other a long time.

CHAPTER V

THE DOWNPOUR

MR. GRANT stood at the kitchen door again, a kindly shabby figure. Toro sniffed warily through the wire at the cat within.

"Anything to send to-day?" the old man asked cheerfully.

"No eggs, but plenty of green stuff," answered Mrs. Frear, going to open the door. "The Gordons wrote that they would take all we could send."

"That's fine." Mr. Grant stepped over the threshold, at the same time excluding the hesitating Toro. "Garden doing well?"

"Yes, very well. We keep at it, you know. Won't you sit down?"

"No, no! Just here for a minute."

Marian went to get the vegetables, freshly packed into wooden boxes. When she came back, Mr. Grant was saying, "Gettin' to be good friends with the folks across the lake?"

"We've seen them once or twice. They've been over for things to eat — eggs, you know, and garden stuff," Mrs. Frear replied. "They seem to be nice people."

"Carl Erickson says they're a lively lot," Mr. Grant remarked —"swimmin' and splashin' around,

hootin' and laffin', and makin' fun of folks, and takin' on generally."

Marian flushed and frowned. Her mother gave her a look. "We think they're very well behaved," said Mrs. Frear calmly.

"I only know what Carl says," admitted the other. "He don't think much of 'em. Now, Mrs. Frear," he went on, before any one could answer, "I'm going to drive in to Willford on Saturday, and I'll do what errands you like. I ain't a doubt but what you've got a lot of things ready to send in."

"Yes, there will be quite a little," Mrs. Frear responded,—"some canned things that the restaurant is taking, and jelly that the Hansens are going to sell for me."

"Well, you have it ready, and I'll come for it."

"That's awfully kind," said Mrs. Frear. She turned to Marian, "I've been thinking — hadn't we better send by Mr. Grant, to get you some white shoes — those canvas pumps, you know?"

"Oh, mother! I wish I could have some." Marian was radiant with pleasure. "Would you just as lief get them, Mr. Grant?"

"Just as lief as flyin', girl. But you must put it all down on paper, so's I'll get the right number, and everything."

"We'll have it so exact that you can't make any mistake," Mrs. Frear assured him.

The old man went away with a loud good-by from his wagon. Toro gave a bark of joy at being off.

"It'll be lovely to have the shoes, mother," Marian burst out. "I've wanted them so much — nobody knows."

"We're doing a little better with the garden than we expected," said the mother; "and you might have some need of new shoes. Girls like that sort of thing."

"I hate to take them, when you have so little," Marian protested nervously.

"I have all I want. Now, wouldn't you like to take this over to the Spaldings?" She indicated a pail of fresh red raspberries.

"Is it necessary?" asked Marian, with a dubious face. "Won't they come for it?"

"They may not be here till to-morrow, and the berries are over-ripe, and ought to be used at once," Mrs. Frear explained. "I had to pick them to save them."

"I believe it's only a scheme of yours to get me over there, mother," said Marian, half laughing. "Honest Injun, isn't it?" She looked searchingly at her mother.

"Do you think I'm a scheming person?" queried the lady.

"Sometimes I do."

Mrs. Frear laughed, and gave her daughter a kiss. "Go on, and get ready," she said, without committing herself.

Marian did not care to discuss the matter. She was really eager to make another trip to the mysterious region of Pigeon's Nest. She stopped and turned at the foot of the stairs. "It's mean of Carl Erickson, isn't it," she said, "to go around saying things about the Spaldings?"

"I don't remember that it was anything really disagreeable," Mrs. Frear returned from the kitchen

door. "It just gave an unpleasant impression."

"That's it. I don't believe he can say anything against them that's true. He has to take it out in little hints. That's the worst way of hurting people, I think."

"I dare say it won't go any further," Mrs. Frear answered. "There isn't much that the Ericksons can do."

Marian went on up stairs to dress. She came back in a white blouse and a well-worn blue serge skirt. The blouse, though of cheap material, was trimmed with tatting of an intricate design. An old cameo pin held the collar in place.

"Do you think it's going to rain, mother?" Marian scanned the sky, where there were tumbling masses of white clouds edged with gray.

"Oh, no, I don't think so." Mrs. Frear was measuring currant-juice, and was too busy to go to the door.

There was no one on the lake. Marian rowed steadily, thinking about the new interest which had come into her life. When she was considerably more than half way across the lake, a low growl of thunder startled her. She looked over her shoulder and saw that the western sky had become very threatening. Dark clouds were rolling up from the horizon, and the heavens would soon be overcast.

The girl felt a pang of irritation. "Perhaps I can get home before the rain really comes," she thought. But she had brought no wraps, and she did not relish the idea of rowing home in a pelting downpour. "If they ask me, I'll have to stay until it's over," she admitted to herself, with terror and

exultation. "If they would only leave me with the books and magazines, I shouldn't mind."

As she came up to the dock, she saw Agnes standing at the top of the bank, looking at the sky. "It's going to rain cats and dogs," she called. "You'd better put your boat in the boathouse."

"Oh, I'm going right back," remonstrated Marian.

"You can't go back," cried Agnes scornfully. "It's going to be an awful storm."

"I'm afraid so," admitted Marian, glancing at the clouds. "Is there room in the boathouse?"

"Plenty."

Marian guided her boat into the shelter. There was space for two boats, but there was none to be seen.

"Did you see our boat?" asked Agnes, as Marian appeared on the sloping bank. "Harvey's out in it."

"No, I didn't see it. Perhaps he's gone to the Cove, after bass." Marian felt that she would be less timid of the others if Harvey were at home. As she climbed the hill, she could see the screened porch, with the two tables on it, and a group of chairs. A slender silk ankle and high-heeled white slipper indicated that "Aunt Elsie" was lying in the capacious hammock which occupied a widened space at the end of the porch.

Lola Spalding sat with a magazine on her lap, gazing anxiously into the lowering shadows over the lake. She got up quickly, when she saw Marian, and came to the screen door. "Oh, come in," she said heartily. "You've brought some more of those

delicious berries, haven't you?" She lifted the pail from Marian's hand. "Agnes, take these to the kitchen, that's a good girl."

"I'm the errand-boy for the family," muttered Agnes with a wry face.

"You can't go back now," said Lola, as Marian made a motion to go.

"I should think not," came from the hammock. A white hand and a book came over the edge, and then Auntie's golden head appeared. "Tell the young lady that she must stay, Lola," said Mrs. Dove.

"I think I'll have to," conceded Marian. "I didn't bring any wraps. Your sister says that — your brother is out." She had almost said "Harvey."

"Yes, but he loves getting wet. It won't hurt him," answered Lola.

The dark clouds had now swung overhead, and the air grew tense with threats. Lightning shivered over the lake. Rumblings came out of the west.

"I shouldn't have started," Marian reproached herself. "But who would have thought it would blow up a storm, like this?"

"I hadn't an idea of it, either; but you never can tell," consoled Lola.

"Agnes, shut the windows upstairs," called Mrs. Dove. "It will rain in."

"That's a good girl!" shrieked Agnes from the sitting room, on her return from the kitchen. Nevertheless, she clumped up the stairs and noisily banged down the windows.

Lola had drawn up a chair for Marian, and now

began to talk to her, to relieve the situation of embarrassment. She wore the same simple dress which she had on when Marian first saw her, and a string of blue beads which just matched the embroidery. "You and your mother live all alone, don't you?" she said.

"Yes, we've lived there at the end of the lake a long time — nearly as long as I can remember." Marian felt a bit uncomfortable at having to talk about herself.

"It's beautiful over there. I've seen it from the boat," continued Lola. "I intended to go with Harve on Saturday, but it rained too hard; and then on Monday he skipped away without asking me."

"You must come over when the weather clears," said Marian, responding as well as she could to the friendly tone of the other.

"I'm going to. Do you get lonely over there?"

"Sometimes." Marian was brief, lest she should say too much.

"We're glad you're there. It helps us out — the vegetables and berries, you know. That sounds selfish, doesn't it?" Lola laughed cheerfully. "Well, it's nice to know that other people are near, too. It's a lot more neighborly —"

Here a crash of thunder sounded, so near that the two girls jumped. The rain began to come down in a sudden spurt. A cold wind swept across the porch, and the slanting rain followed. "Oh, dear! we'll have to go inside," Lola complained. Papers began to blow. A vase of flowers overturned. The three women scrambled to pick things up, and drag the chairs and benches close to the wall. Mrs. Dove,

slightly dishevelled, and putting hairpins back into her hair, had the martyred look of one whose siesta has been broken in upon.

Marian fell to, and helped with rugs and cushions and books. In a few minutes, she found herself in the living-room, with her arms full of magazines.

"Agnes, shut the door!" cried Mrs. Dove, as a furious blast of wind and rain swept full across the porch. There were laughter and sighs of relief, when the group was safely shut in. "Gracious, how dark it it. I hate the lightning!" Mrs. Dove exclaimed, with her hands over her eyes. "Agnes, child, light the lamp — that's a dear!"

"I'm doing it. I knew I'd be a dear," said Agnes calmly. She was already taking the chimney from the big lamp on the table. She lighted it and put back the yellow shade; a mellow glow flooded the room.

Marian laid her armful of magazines on the table and looked about. The unplastered walls were finished in pine. There were chintz hangings at the windows, and along the wall a cot-sofa held cushions of the same material. Some low willow chairs were ranged about, and a big willow basket beside the hearth held pine cones, twigs, and wood. Though Marian could not discern all the details of the room, she gained an idea of its simplicity, and, as it seemed to her, its elegance.

The storm was now howling about the cottage, the rain pounding on the roof, and the thunder crashing. Heavy boughs of trees scraped mournfully along the shingles.

Mrs. Dove took her hands from her face,

resignedly. She looked charming in a blue linen dress, a trifle crumpled after the lady's nap in the hammock. "I don't believe it's too warm to have a fire," she said in her impulsive way. "It cheers things up so. Oh, sit here, Miss — Miss —"

"Frear — Marian Frear."

Mrs. Dove smiled at the shrinking girl. "That's a musical name," she said. "But I think of you as The-Girl-with-the-Thread-Lace. Oh, well, it's tatting to-day, and lovely at that — so fine and intricate. Did you make it?"

"No, my mother did. Do you think it's pretty?" Marian had thought tatting rather plain homemade stuff, hardly better than nothing.

"I never saw a daintier pattern." Mrs. Dove came near, to examine it, slipping her fingers under the edge of the collar. Marian, thrilling at the touch, noted the graceful hand with a quaint dull blue and silver ring, and caught the scent of a faint perfume. She perceived vaguely the unassuming elegance of a woman for whom life has been rich and easy. "I'd like some of it," said Mrs. Dove thoughtfully.

Marian did not know whether to say that her mother would make some of the tatting. In her confusion she said nothing.

Agnes was putting pine cones into the fireplace, and now touched them with a match. The flame spurted up, gold and blue. "How beautiful!" cried Lola. They all settled into chairs to watch the progress of the fire, half forgetting the uproar of the storm outside.

Marian sat back gratefully in a comfortable chair,

and watched the wood succumb to the flame. It was the first time since she was a child that she had seen a fire in a fireplace.

"Don't you love an open fire?" Lola asked pleasantly.

Marian made an inarticulate noise of assent. She did not like to confess that open fires were not a part of her usual experience.

"I can't live without one!" exclaimed Mrs. Dove. "I just won't stay where there isn't one! It seems strange to me that the Americans don't have them as a matter of course. In Europe —"

"Yes, in Europe," broke in Agnes, "the houses are as cold as refrigerators — Lola says so. She says that they don't have any furnaces at all, and either they don't have a spark of fire, or else there's a handful of coal in a grate as big as a cigar-box. Everybody shivers all winter and goes around absolutely blue with cold. Give me a furnace, every time!"

Then Lola had been in Europe! This fact seemed marvelous to the girl who listened to the talk.

"Perhaps you've forgotten how we nearly froze to death in Paris, Auntie," reminded Lola, "and the time we had keeping warm in London, when we were waiting for Mrs. Cleaver to come, before we went to Cannes."

"M-m," admitted Auntie, in a subdued way, "the Americans do understand how to keep warm, but they're sometimes terribly lacking when it comes to artistic effects."

"Artistic effects don't warm your feet," sniffed Agnes.

"There, there, dear," admonished Mrs. Dove amiably.

"It's a good thing to have comfort and art, too," put in Lola. "I think there are a lot of Americans who are quite equal to both."

Marian thought of the struggle which she and her mother had with the cold, in the depths of winter, when the thermometer showed twenty and even thirty degrees below zero. There were stoves which ate greedily of their store of precious wood, and then barely kept the house livably warm. Sometimes she and her mother would have to bring a bed down into the living room, and cuddle into the one room, like rabbits in a burrow. The conversation around the fire frightened her. She took up a magazine, turning the pages with a pretense of idle interest, but at the same time she was terrorstricken lest she should be expected to contribute to the discussion.

Mrs. Dove saved her by an abrupt change of subject. "It's time for afternoon tea," she said, looking at her gold wrist-watch. "Agnes, will you tell Barbara that we're ready for it?"

Marian was in a flutter as Agnes went obediently to the kitchen. Afternoon tea with these strangers was an event which she had not anticipated.

Lola pulled a small table up to the fire, and spread a plain linen cloth, buttonholed with orange floss. From the dining-room she brought the blue cups which Marian had seen on the porch. "Oh!" she thought, "I shall drink out of one, after all." Then with an effort she said, "They're such pretty cups." She had not said anything for so long that she was becoming ashamed.

"Yes, I like this Japanese ware with the plain glaze," answered Lola. "I have a breakfast set in pink, for my room."

She brought on spoons and plates. "We're using paper napkins, to save ironing," Mrs. Dove explained. "Get some out of the drawer, Agnes dear."

A colored girl carried in a tray, with teapot, cream, sugar, and a plate of oatmeal cookies. Mrs. Dove poured the tea in a business-like way. Marian accepted a cup, with "cream, but no sugar, please."

"I hope Harvey's all right," said Lola, not at all uneasy.

"He'll take care of himself. When we came here, I made up my mind not to worry about him," commented Mrs. Dove.

"Do you go to school?" asked Agnes suddenly, fixing her black eyes on the stranger. "I mean, during the year. This is vacation, of course."

"No, n-not now," murmured Marian, putting her spoon into her saucer. "There's no school near —"

"What school *did* you go to, then?" Agnes took a generous bite from her oatmeal cooky, staring over it with unembarrassed gaze.

"Just the country school, over on the road, about a mile and a half away." Marian tried to speak as if going to the country school were all that heart could wish.

"Oh-h!" Agnes paused in surprise.

Mrs. Dove broke in with a remark about Harvey. "If he has his slicker, he's all right. Did you notice whether he took it, Agnes?"

"No, Auntie, I didn't. Isn't there any school

that you can get to, at all?" persisted the girl, still eying the guest.

"Not nearer than Willford, nine miles away; there's a high school there."

"That *is* a long way," said Lola sympathetically, giving Agnes a warning glance.

"But you'll have to go to school *somewhere,* won't you?" queried Agnes imperturbably, proceeding to devour her cooky.

Marian flushed, and almost spilled her tea. "I wish I could," she said painfully. "But I don't see how."

"It's often quite a problem to decide just what to do," Mrs. Dove remarked smoothly, pouring more cream into her tea. "Most people find it so — except spoiled babies,—" She raised her eyebrows at Agnes. Then she went on, "Of course you don't want to leave your mother. She must find this region very lonely, as it is. She's a lady; I can see that."

"How?" Marian spoke in astonishment. "She is — but how can you tell?"

"Because of the thread lace, and the way you speak," Mrs. Dove replied with a wise smile.

"Mother has worked so hard," said Marian, speaking rapidly. "It's been dreadfully hard for her since father died. She had to take care of me — I was just a little thing — and there wasn't much to do with. I think she's wonderful." This was not at all what the girl had intended to say. When one is embarrassed, one says almost anything.

"She's awfully nice," Agnes blurted out. "I liked her, the first thing."

"She liked you, too," said Marian, glad that she could say this truthfully.

"Oh, did she?" Agnes flushed with satisfaction.

"Harvey thinks she's fine," added Lola. "She's so natural, he says."

Marian was thinking, "Natural! That's what I ought to be."

Mrs. Dove broke in suavely again. "Do you think she's worrying about you?"

"No, I don't believe so. She probably knows I'm under shelter somewhere."

"It's too bad there isn't a telephone," Lola remarked. "Father talks about putting one in, so that he can call us up and see how we are."

The rain had now begun to abate. The pounding on the roof had slackened, and the thunder grew more distant. The little group were finishing their tea, while the fire sank into hot red coals.

Presently they were aware of a voice outside, singing lustily,

"It is not raining rain to-day,
It's raining vi-o-lets!"

There was a long tremolo on the last word, and a falsetto quirk at the end.

"Harve," said Agnes in a matter-of-fact tone.

The screen door creaked, and Harvey came in, stamping, and shaking the rain from his felt hat and yellow slicker. "Hello, folks," he called jovially. "Hooray for the fire!

"It is not r-r-raining r-rain to-day,"

he sang as he threw his coat over a chair, and his hat on the couch.

"Oh, you did have your yellow Mother Hubbard on," said Agnes, turning on her willow stool.

"Yes, darling Ag, I had my Mother Hubbard under the seat of the boat," the boy returned. "How do you do, Miss Frear? When did you fly into Pigeon's Nest?"

"Just before the storm broke," answered Marian.

"Good work. Ha! tea!" shouted Harvey. "Saved! A sail on the horizon."

"It's cold," said Mrs. Dove, pouring him a cup. "I know you don't like it, anyhow, so it doesn't make any difference."

"I like what goes with it," returned Harvey, taking two oatmeal cookies at once. "It's a wonder that Little Ag left any. She must have been too busy asking questions. Hum! I see by the faces before me that me r-random thr-rust went home." He gazed from Marian's telltale countenance to Agnes's guilty one.

"Harvey, do be sensible," murmured Lola. "Why, the rain has almost stopped!" she exclaimed, looking out at the window. "Let's have the door open."

Harvey, eating cookies, threw open the door, and the fresh cool air rushed in. With one accord the group rose and went out on the porch, drawing in deep breaths.

"How the pines smell!" cried Mrs. Dove. "It's splendid out here in the woods, even if one does miss her bridge-parties."

"I must be going," said Marian, "now that the storm is over."

The sun was beginning to break through the

clouds, and the gray tone of the lake was swiftly changing to blue.

"Don't hurry. I've just come," Harvey remonstrated, finishing his tea, and setting his cup down on the porch table.

"I've been here a long time, and mother will be wondering about me," persisted Marian.

"Well, you'll come again," said Mrs. Dove.

"Wouldn't you like to take some magazines along?" asked Lola, in an offhand way. "Father sends us so many that they clutter up the house."

"Why-y, yes, I'd like some ever so much," Marian replied, trying to speak as easily as Lola; but she had an exultant leap of the heart.

Lola gathered up half a dozen, and put them into Marian's hands. "Take these along," she said, smilingly, "and when you've finished with them, there'll be more."

"Oh, thank you," cried the departing guest, fearful lest she should overdo her gratitude, because the magazines meant more to her than Lola could possibly know. She looked into the other girl's eyes, and found them very clear and friendly. "Won't you come over?" Marian asked impulsively.

"Yes, I'm going to, right away."

"I am, too," put in Agnes. "I want to see your mother again, because I like her."

"No mention of the rest of our family!" thought Marian, but she spoke aloud only her polite goodbyes.

Harvey went down the hill with her to get out the boat. "It's fine after the rain," he said as they stood at the door of the boathouse.

"Yes, everything looks so clean. Were you really out in the storm? Your family didn't seem worried about you."

"I was over in the Cove, and I ran for that old hayshed that's back there in the marsh. I was perfectly all right. But I'm sorry I didn't make a bee-line for home." Harvey went in and brought out Marian's boat, a shabby barque beside the *Paloma*. He held it at the dock while she got in. "Say," he said eagerly, as she took up the oars, "I'm glad you got rain-bound here."

"Why?" asked the girl, looking up at him inquiringly.

"Oh, so that you could get acquainted with the girls and Aunt Elsie."

"Yes, they're awfully nice; but—" Marian steadied the boat with her oars, backing out a bit from under a dripping June-berry bush.

"But what?"

"They know so much. They scare me," the girl confessed, in a low voice.

Harvey stood with his hands in his pockets. "Hm, do they?" he asked. Then after a pause, he said, "And don't I?"

"No, hardly at all," answered Marian.

"Ha!" chuckled the boy. "Behold the value of not knowing so much!"

"I didn't mean that," cried Marian, getting red.

"I'm not so sure," the lad teased her. "But listen," he went on, leaning over the boat, "I'd let them be nice to me, if I were you." Marian felt that he meant to say, "They can help you a good deal."

"I will," she promised, looking up at him; "if they can stand it."

"Don't worry. They can."

Marian laughed, feeling light at heart. "Well, good-bye," she said, as she pushed the boat away from the dock. Harvey raised his hand to his forehead in a gesture of farewell. "And I'm glad, too, that I got rain-bound," said Marian to herself.

CHAPTER VI

THE UNSEEN HAND

MARIAN laid aside the magazine which she had been reading. "I'm so sleepy!" she sighed, looking over at her mother, who on the other side of the table was reading a long sober article. "I can hardly leave these magazines — they're so interesting."

"It was nice of Miss Spalding to lend them to you," said Mrs. Frear absently, with her eyes still on the page.

"The Spaldings are all nice," said Marian meditatively, "except Agnes, maybe. I'm not crazy over her." She was thinking uncomfortably of the too-direct questions which Agnes had put to her, at the unexpected tea-party.

Mrs. Frear raised her head. "I don't see anything wrong with Agnes," she protested. Then she added, with her whimsical smile, "We like people better after we've done something for them."

Marian had risen, yawning. "I suppose that's so," she admitted. "But I can't imagine anything that I could do for Agnes Spalding."

"You never know." Mrs. Frear was deep in her article again, and kept on reading when Marian came to kiss her good-night.

The girl went up to her room with the candle

which served as her only light on summer evenings. The room was fresh and dainty, with some pieces of old-fashioned furniture. Marian stood in front of the oval mirror of her dressing table, and took down her hair from its hard flat arrangement. She thought of Lola's soft brown hair, becomingly coiled and puffed.

"I wonder how she does it?" Marian whispered. Clumsily, she tried to do her own hair in the same way. With nervous hands, she pulled the twisted locks this way and that. Her arms ached, and she grew red and irritated. "I don't seem to get it, at all," she murmured. "It's too bad. I'm sure it would make me look a lot better, if I could do it." She gave up in despair, blew out her candle, and went to stand at the window, which overlooked the garden. A white mist was rising from the field beyond, but the garden lay in dusky quietness. Faintly lighter spots showed where the blossoming verbenas stood; and fireflies flashed and wavered in the grass. The frogs in the meadow were croaking ceaselessly. Away down in the grove, next to the lake, an owl sounded a deep sorrowful note.

Marian had loved these summer nights, ever since she could remember. "I'd hate to leave this place," she thought ruefully. "I suppose I love it more than I realize, myself. It's only the feeling that I'm not getting anywhere, that worries me." As she got into bed, she was wondering, though she could not have put the thought into words, just how discontented one ought to allow himself to be, when he is ambitious to better himself. "It's too much of a puzzle for me," she confessed, as she fell asleep.

The next forenoon, Harvey and Lola and Agnes came over, with what Harvey named " a hurry call " for eggs and cream. Marian had little talk with them. Mrs. Frear attended to their wants, and they hastened away with friendly wavings and good-byes.

" Miss Lola is a sweet ladylike girl," said Mrs. Frear approvingly. " I hope you'll get to be good friends."

" Perhaps we shall." Marian spoke with conviction.

The day after, she looked up suddenly from weeding the cabbages, to see Lola Spalding coming up the path alone. " Whoo-hoo ! " Lola called, spying Marian among the greenth of the garden. She made her way through the little gate, and out among the rows of vegetables.

Marian rose, pleased but shy. " Did you row over by yourself ? " she asked, when greetings were finished.

" No, I left Harvey down at the lake, fishing for blue-gills. I thought I'd come up and call on you,— not just for things that we could snatch and gobble, but for the sake of being friendly."

" It's awfully nice of you," Marian said warmly. " Let's go into the house, out of the hot sun." Lola, in a freshly ironed blue-and-brown gingham, seemed too crisply clean for contact with the soil.

" No, I'm not going to take you away from your work. I didn't come to interrupt. I know what it is to have work to do."

Marian could not forbear smiling incredulously. " I don't believe you ever did any of this kind of work," she said.

"Not exactly. But all kinds of work are a good deal the same, aren't they? I don't see much difference." Lola pulled her wide straw hat forward, to shade her eyes, as she looked smilingly at Marian.

"I never thought of that;" the other girl moved a little pile of weeds dubiously with her foot.

"Father often talks to us about such things," Lola explained. "I don't know that I should think of them by myself."

"Then," said Marian, frowning, and looking down at her grimy hands, "you'd think just as well of any one who weeded cabbages as of any one who painted pictures?"

"Why, yes, of course," Lola replied quickly. "Cabbages are just as necessary as pictures, aren't they?"

"More so, in my life," said Marian drily.

"Mine, too." Lola spoke with simple humor. "Now, come on, let's finish up these old cabbages in about three seconds, and then we can talk."

Marian looked alarmed. "Oh, no, I couldn't let you do this sort of thing," she said. "I'll be through in a few minutes. There isn't such an awful lot to do."

"Let me help,— please do."

"No, no — your hands, your dress —" Marian protested, as Lola stooped and wrenched out a sturdy weed.

"They'll wash." Out came another weed in Lola's firm grasp.

"Oh, please don't!"

"Why not?" Lola stood up abruptly.

"It doesn't seem right. You're too pretty — too

soft,— too — I don't know how to say it —" Marian stammered.

"Whatever it is, I'm no such thing," cried Lola, humorously indignant. "You should see me in the gymnasium. I've taken a prize for work with the horizontal bar, and throwing the discus."

The horizontal bar and the discus were unknown entities to Marian, but she stared respectfully. "Have you, really?" she exclaimed.

"Now I think you'll let me weed cabbages," retorted Lola, attacking the weeds again.

"Wait. I'll get a bag for you to kneel on," said Marian, quite subdued. She brought an old but clean burlap bag, and Lola tucked up her gingham skirt, kneeling on her petticoat ruffles. In a few minutes, the two girls were hard at work, giving short shrift to a week's accumulation of weeds.

For a while they labored silently, in their eagerness to get their task completed. Now and then they stopped to wipe the sweat of honest toil from their faces. "My hair is getting all straggly," said Lola. A few wavy stands had blown about her temples.

"It looks all right," said Marian — "just loose, and not untidy."

Lola looked at her companion speculatively. "You have pretty hair," she said, her hands busy among the cabbage-stalks. "I've always loved dark hair, and mine never gets beyond a light brown. I wish you'd let me do your hair for you," she went on hurriedly. "It ought to be a little looser — puffier, you know. You need it — your face is so finely cut."

Marian hesitated, hardly knowing whether to be

chagrined or not, at the remark about the way in which she did her hair. "I've often thought it needed to be done differently," she admitted. "But I do it like this so that it won't blow when I'm out working, or rowing on the lake."

"What you need is a net," advised Lola. "That will keep it from blowing."

"Oh, I didn't think of that."

"Agnes has some that you could wear, I think. Mine wouldn't be the right color," Lola responded. "But will you let me do your hair to-day?"

"I'd be glad to," Marian answered. "I tried to do it differently myself, but somehow I couldn't."

"It's easier if you have some one to show you," Lola encouraged her.

They chatted on, until the work was done. "It went twice as fast as usual," said Marian, with a sigh of weariness. "Aren't you tired?"

"A little. But who says I can't weed cabbages?"

"I'd recommend you for it, anywhere." Marian laughed happily.

"Race you to the house," cried Lola.

"Race *you!*"

The two girls dashed across the garden and through the gate, and around to the kitchen door. Lola reached the goal first, panting and giggling. They went in and washed their hands at the sink. "We'll go up to my room," said Marian. "We'll have to be a little careful, because mother is lying down upstairs."

As they went through the sitting-room, Lola stopped and stared. "Oh, what a lovely table!" she burst out.

Marian looked at the old mahogany table carelessly. "Is it? Mother says it's nice," she commented. "It was her mother's."

"It's a beauty. Old French, I think," said Lola, with her head on one side, as she examined the piece of furniture. "Auntie will know."

They went up the steep narrow stairs on tiptoe, into Marian's room. Fresh white curtains were blowing back from the two windows. There were strips of rag carpet on the floor. In the corner stood an old four-poster bed, with a white coverlet of the old-fashioned knotted variety. On the two other sides of the room were the dressing table, and a handsome chest of drawers with glass knobs. Exquisite order and neatness reigned.

"It's a perfectly scrumptious room!" whispered Lola, in fear of waking Mrs. Frear. "Excuse me for remarking on your things, but I just can't help it."

Marian looked bewildered. "I've always had them," she said. "I've never thought much about them." She was glad that Lola could find something to admire in the little shabby house. "But what I'm interested in is hair."

Lola turned reluctantly away from the contemplation of some quaint old pictures in gilt frames. "Take it down," she said, meaning the hair, "and I'll see what I can do as a lady's maid. I love to fuss with other people's hair."

Marian took down her hair, which was long and soft and fine, and brushed it out carefully. "It's like silk," commented Lola. "You ought to make the most of it. Now sit down, and I'll get to work.

Oh —" she leaned over the dressing-table — "there's some of that old tufted work that Auntie is so crazy about."

Marian looked absently at the old cover of the table, wondering why any one should be crazy about that sort of thing. Then she watched herself in the glass, while Lola skillfully separated the dark mass of hair into strands, and then twisted and pulled each strand into place, with an occasional, "Let me see how that looks," and, "No, I think this way is better." Hardly a word was exchanged between the two girls, until the process was complete, and Lola laid down the comb, saying in a satisfied tone, "How do you like yourself now?"

The other girl took up a handglass, and examined the side and back of her head critically. A slow flush of pleasure mounted to her cheeks. She had not understood what a difference it would make to have her hair done in a really becoming way. "It — it's a terrific lot better, isn't it?" she faltered.

"It's splendid," cried Lola, pleased with her handiwork. "You see, it's just as simple as can be, but it's softer than it was before, and higher, so that it makes a better outline, and frames your face better, too."

"I see," said Marian in a bewildered tone. "I like it awfully."

"Now you look like yourself," Lola went on, patting the other girl's shoulder. "It makes me happy to see you look so nice." Then she added in a business-like way, "Take it down, and I'll show you how to do it yourself."

"Oh, dear! I don't want to take it down. I

know I'll never be able to make it look fit to be seen." Marian put her two hands over her hair as if to protect it.

"Nonsense. There's nothing elaborate or mysterious about it," laughed Lola. "I'll show you so well that you can make it look exactly the same."

"We-ell." Marian, still somewhat incredulous and regretful, took down her hair again. Slowly and carefully Lola set about teaching her how to put it up. "No, not that way," she would say. "There, feel of it, and see how the coil goes, here in the back. That's fine! You're getting it, perfectly." At last Marian succeeded in achieving the same result which Lola herself had accomplished. Glowing with pride, she took the handglass, and studied the effect of a half-hour's work.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you for taking so much pains," she said, when she laid down the glass. "Oh, must you go?"

Lola had looked at her wrist-watch, with an exclamation of dismay. "Yes, I must. You know, I told Harvey I'd be back at the landing in an hour, and it's a good deal more than that now."

"I'm sorry you have to go," said Marian. She had learned a great deal in the short space which had elapsed since Lola had appeared among the cabbage-rows.

"Oh, I'll come again. And you must walk down to the landing with me."

Mrs. Frear had begun to stir about in the next room, and they did not need to lower their voices, as they clattered merrily down the stairs, and out at the back door. They walked down through the

meadow, chatting as girls do. "I want to bring Auntie over to look at the table, sometime," Lola was saying, "if your mother will let her. Auntie has made a study of old American furniture — and other kinds, too — and she's given several fine pieces to the museum in her home town in Illinois."

"Of course, mother will love to let her see it," Marian responded. "Mother has a lot of old things," she went on thoughtfully —"laces, and hand embroideries, and queer old jewelry, and such things; and some old china, too, that she keeps on the top shelf in her closet. I haven't seen it for a long time. Perhaps it doesn't amount to anything." She was afraid of seeming to boast.

"Auntie will know," Lola replied. "She has an eye like an eagle's for anything of that sort. She'd run a mile in a snow-storm to find some old cracked plate, or an old broken-down chair. If the things at your house please her, she'll probably lock your mother in the cellar, and run off with the choicest treasures!"

The two girls were laughing, as they pushed through the bushes, under the poplars and cherry trees. Just then they heard a *whoo-hoo* from the landing, and as they emerged upon the tiny beach under the bass-wood tree, they saw Harvey approaching in the *Paloma*. With a greeting tossed over his shoulder, he pulled his boat swiftly to the landing, and got out to help Lola in. Marian, not a little self-conscious, noted that he gave her new manner of hair-dressing a quick approving glance.

"Ha! who's late?" cried Lola. "We nearly got apoplexy, sprinting down here, thinking that you

would be having a fit over my tardiness, and you've hardly got here, yourself."

"Oh, I'm here, all right," Harvey answered. "I gave you about twenty minutes' leeway. I haven't been a brother and a nephew for fifteen or twenty years, for nothing."

"I think you're mean, Harve," protested Lola. "You know I'm nearly always on time."

"Always — unless you aren't," retorted Harvey gravely. "I'll vouch for that."

Marian, unused to this fraternal sparring, began to feel uncomfortable. "Oh, look at the fish!" she said, peering into the boat. "You caught a lot, didn't you?"

"Yes, quite a bunch; but they're only blue-gills. The girls like 'em, though, when they're fried brown, — I mean the fish, not the girls, are fried brown."

Lola was getting into the boat, assisted by Harvey's brotherly hand. "Oh, I forgot," she said, looking at Marian. "Why don't you come over and go bathing with us to-morrow?"

Marian looked pleased. She felt a certain feminine assurance from the knowledge that her hair was right. "I've often gone over there to bathe," she answered. "Your beach is the best on the lake. The bottom is too soft, here."

"Then you'll surely come over and swim with us," Lola remarked, seating herself, and settling the folds of her gingham dress.

"I — I'd like to." Marian thought of her home-made bathing-suit. ("I don't care," she was saying to herself; "I'm going to have as good a time as I

can, anyhow.") "Yes, I'll come. Thank you ever so much,— for everything," she added, with a knowing look at Lola. The other girl returned it with the freemasonry which girls very quickly set up among themselves.

"Then come over to-morrow afternoon, about four o'clock. That's the time we usually go in. You can swim, of course?"

"Oh, yes, it seems as if I always knew how," Marian called. The boat had been pushed off, and was now moving out into the bluer water.

"We're not experts at all." Lola raised her voice. "I can do a little better than Agnes. Harvey's like a frog — but then, boys always are."

"That's a doubtful compliment," put in Harvey, grinning at Marian, as he pulled at the oars. "Anyhow, we'll expect you over to-morrow."

Marian smiled wistfully, hardly noticing what was said. Her mind was leaping forward to the next day, when she should renew the friendship which had grown so swiftly during this afternoon.

The next afternoon, at the hour appointed, after a busy day, she put her bathing-suit under the seat of her boat, and rowed in a leisurely way across the stretch of waters. She found Agnes Spalding sitting on the dock in her bathing-suit, swinging her feet over the water, and feeding the minnows with crumbs.

"Shall I wait till you've finished?" called Marian, hesitating to scare away the little fish with her oars.

"It doesn't matter," Agnes replied cheerfully.

"They've existed quite a while without bread-crumbs and me. Are you going to go bathing with us?" she asked bluntly.

"Your sister asked me to," Marian replied. She brought her boat in and fastened it to a post at the pier. Swarms of tiny minnows darkened the water, fleeing in haste as the boat came near them. Marian sat for a moment in the prow, looking at them, and then at the delicate sprays of purple lobelia, reflected in the water below the bank, and the twisted honeysuckle vines bearing berries touched with red. Above, on each side of the pier, great clusters of June-berries were turning black and luscious. "You have a lovely place," she sighed.

"But yours is, too," said Agnes practically. "I guess Lola's waiting for you up on the porch." She had begun playing with the fish again.

Marian climbed the hill, and found Lola on the porch. She sprang up to open the door. "Just in time!" she cried.

They went up stairs to put on their suits. Marian dressed in a small room, with walls of planed board, and striped chintz hangings, somewhat faded, as if they had been taken from a bedroom at home. A white iron bedstead, a plain dark oak dresser, and a chair or two were the only furnishings. The girl's bathing-suit was a clumsy affair, made of an old skirt of her mother's. Mrs. Frear had urged Marian to make it herself, and the result was not artistic. She drew on black cotton stockings, and tied up her hair in a red cotton handkerchief, immensely becoming, if she had known it, but not like the trim little scarlet rubber cap which Lola wore. As she came out of

the bedroom, and met Lola on the landing, Marian felt, for a minute, self-conscious and chagrined. Lola's suit was a graceful "bought" one of silver-gray poplin, trimmed with scarlet. She looked as pretty as a mermaid, with her slim neck, and round soft arms.

"Come on!" Lola put her arm around Marian's waist, and the two girls went down stairs to the living-room. "Auntie" had just come out of her bedroom on the ground floor. Her bathing-suit was of black silk, trimmed with rose-color, and she had dainty bathing-slippers with criss-crossed tapes around her ankles. Again Marian felt awkward and out of place.

Harvey was going down the hill, singing at the top of his voice,

"If you love me true,
As I think you do,
There is room for you
In my bungaloo;
And I'll always do
Anything for you
That you want me to-oo-oo!"

"Harve has the silliest collection of songs," grumbled Lola. "I don't know where on earth he learns them."

"They *are* trying," frowned Mrs. Dove, "but there's no use in arguing with him."

They all went down the hill to the water, where Harvey and Agnes were splashing about. "Hurry up, Auntie," called Harvey. "You said you'd row across the lake, while I swim."

"Father won't let him swim as far as that unless

there's a boat beside him," Lola explained. "I don't know that it's really necessary."

"It's better, on a long swim like that," said Marian. "Nothing ever happens, but you don't know what might."

"I suppose so; anyway, father's firm," Lola replied.

Mrs. Dove, who was a good rower, but not fond of exertion, got obediently into the *Paloma*. Harvey, standing in the shallow water, made a low ceremonious bow to his friends, and slid down, swimming out quickly into the deep water, followed by his aunt in the boat. Marian would have liked to swim across the lake, too. She knew she could do it, for she had swum just as far, with her mother rowing beside her. But she did not dare to suggest going. It would not "look nice" for her to leave the girls, and go paddling off with Harvey.

Lola and Agnes splashed about in an amateurish way, taking a few strokes at a time. Marian swam out around a post which projected slightly above the surface, where the water was about fifteen feet deep. And then, enjoying the warmth of the water, and the gentle breeze which was blowing, she turned on her back and floated.

"Oh, look!" cried Agnes. "See what Marian is doing. Isn't that splendid?" She gazed in open-mouthed admiration. "Can you tread water?" she called, from the safer shallows.

"That's easy," laughed Marian, flopping over to tread water, and keeping herself up as easily as a lily.

"I think you're a wonder," Lola praised her, as

she came back to where the girls were crouched. "It's great to be able to do things as easily as that."

"Harvey's a long way out," remarked Agnes. His head and arm were visible on the bright surface. Mrs. Dove, a little behind him, was toiling at the oars. "I wish I could swim that far. You can, can't you?" Agnes turned to Marian.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so." Marian spoke as indifferently as she could.

"You would have liked to try," suggested Lola. "It's too bad you didn't."

"It's just as well for your aunt not to have to watch two," Marian replied.

Agnes had splashed farther out, by this time. "I believe I could tread water, too," she called to Marian.

"Oh, now, do be careful, Ag," Lola admonished her.

"Ag! That makes me desperate." Still muttering, Agnes swam out toward the post in the water. Half-submerged, Lola and Marian were watching Harvey, shading their eyes from the slanting rays of the sun. The boy was swimming steadily, and was now more than half way across the lake.

Presently the two girls heard a choking sound. Marian looked swiftly around her. "Where's Agnes?" she said hurriedly.

"Right here, isn't she?" said Lola absently.

But Agnes was not to be seen. Marian noted that there was an agitation of the water near the projecting pole; then the pole itself shook slightly.

"Oh, Agnes, Agnes!" screamed Lola. "She's down in there!"

"She can't be," answered Marian breathlessly, "or she'd come up."

Lola began to shriek, "Oh, Marian, can't you help her?"

Marian made a dash for the deep water around the post, and swam rapidly to it. Looking down, she could see a dark form near the base of the post, in the muddied water. She heard Lola calling, "Oh, Harvey! Auntie! Come, come, come!" There were answering cries from across the lake.

Marian dived, and clung to the pole. She discovered that Agnes was caught and held, deep under water. Frantically, the older girl let herself down, treading water. Agnes reached for her, despairingly. Marian tried to shake her off, and to get hold of her clothing, but the groping fingers closed hard upon her arm. Fighting and struggling to free herself, and to keep her balance under water, she reached down, and tried to tear the folds of Agnes's bathing-suit from the spike on which it had caught. She could not disentangle it. With a terrific effort, she tore the girl's clinging hands away, and rose to the surface for air. Amid the gurgle of water in her ears, she heard Lola's piteous cry, and a loud halloo. Then she went down to her task again.

Agnes clutched at her, but her struggles had grown feebler. An overwhelming fear made Marian numb. With a superhuman wrench at the heavy cloth, she tore the folds away, and sprang to the surface, pulling Agnes with her. Holding to the post with one hand, she turned Agnes around, so that she could see the girl's white face. Marian was gasping and panting, for her endeavors under water

had been almost more than she could bear. While she clung there, too weary to move, she heard the frantic creak of oars, and Harvey's tense cry, "Coming, coming!"

Before the half-width of the lake had been covered by the boat, Marian had dragged the fainting girl across the space between the post and the dock. Lola, the tears running down her face, helped to lay her sister upon the warm boards of the pier.

"Turn her over," whispered Marian hoarsely. "And roll her back and forth." Lola and Marian, their hands trembling with suspense, manipulated the solid little body of the rescued sister. Agnes stirred, sputtered, and drew a long breath. "She's all right," said Marian, standing to her waist in water. Her cap had fallen from her head, and her long dark hair lay close against her cheek and shoulder. She was aware that the *Paloma* was approaching, with Harvey at the oars.

"What is it? What is it? Is Agnes drowned?" Mrs. Dove was wailing.

"No, no, no!" shouted Marian, getting her breath. "She's alive, and perfectly well."

By the time the *Paloma* bumped at the dock, Agnes was sitting up, blinking and panting. "I — I'm all right," she said jerkily. "Just went under a minute — couldn't get loose."

"You darling girl! what is the matter?" Mrs. Dove was out of the boat, and hugging the dripping Agnes.

"Agnes, Agnes, dear! are you hurt?" Harvey was clasping his sister's shoulders, and trying to look into her face.

"I'm all right, Harve." Agnes tried to smile.

"M-Marian saved her. I couldn't do a thing," blubbered Lola.

"What in the world was the trouble?" demanded Mrs. Dove.

"Her bathing-suit caught on something — a nail, I think, on that post out there," Marian explained.

"I shouldn't have gone and left you," Harvey was repeating, in a tone of self-reproach. "I should have been looking after you. What kind of a brother am I, anyway?"

"Oh, Harve, you weren't to blame," protested Agnes wanly. "You didn't know. Nobody knew."

Mrs. Dove was reaching out her hand to Marian, over Agnes's head. "You blessed girl!" she said brokenly.

Marian was regaining her strength and composure. "It wasn't anything much," she murmured. "I mean, any one would have done that."

Harvey swam over to the post, to find out what had caused the trouble. "There's a big spike sticking out of the wood, nearly as far down as the bottom of the lake," he said when he came back. "I don't see how in time you happened to get hung up on it, Aggie."

"Nobody but me could," replied Agnes with unwonted humility.

The others laughed, glad to relieve the tension of the last few minutes.

"No more swimming to-day," said Mrs. Dove, with a glance at the faces around her. "I'm so nervous, I couldn't bear to see one of you bouncing

in the water. Come, Agnes, that's a dear! Come on up and get dressed. Do you feel able to climb the hill, sweetheart?"

"I'll see." Agnes got stiffly to her feet. "Why, I'm all right," she exclaimed in surprise. "I don't feel hurt a bit."

"Take it slowly," warned Marian. "Don't get out of breath."

"A step at a time, sister," said Harvey. "Now, take hold of my arm. I'll help you."

"Fudge! I'm not an old lady," cried Sister, crossly.

"Oh, do it just to please me," Harvey coaxed, putting his hand under her elbow. "One, two, three! Now we start!"

The others clambered up the hill, Agnes and Harvey ascending more slowly. As Marian reached the top, she felt Mrs. Dove's arm around her. "You *good* girl," said the lady impulsively, "we can never thank you — never!"

Rescuing Agnes had seemed such a natural thing to do that Marian could only stammer, "Don't try. Of course, I wanted to do it. Anybody would," she repeatedly lamely.

"Not everybody could." To Marian's relief, Mrs. Dove did not say any more.

Without many words, the group scattered to dress. Putting her clothes on, in the chintz-hung bedroom, Marian exulted in the thought that she had not given up. No one knew what a struggle she had had, there in the water, with the drowning girl clutching at her, and fear weighing her down. She dressed slowly, for she felt heavy and weary. Through the

thin partitions, she could hear what was going on in the rest of the house. Down stairs, in her own bedroom, Mrs. Dove was insisting on Agnes's resting in bed for a while.

"Well, then, just fifteen minutes," Agnes consented. "But I'm all right, Auntie, I keep telling you —"

"Agnes, do as your aunt asks you," came Harvey's voice from another quarter of the upper story. "That's a good girl."

Agnes sighed loudly. "All right, Harve," she called, in the tone of a martyr.

Presently all but the rescued heroine had gathered in the sitting-room. Barbara, the maid, with eyes rolling in her excitement over the late adventure, brought in the tray for tea. "I'm glad I made some o' them there cakes Miss Agnes likes best," she said in an awed tone, as if Agnes were somehow dead and yet living. "Law, Miss Elsie, ain't that awful, her gettin' ketched down under the water like that?"

"Oh, she's all right now, Barbara," said Lola cheerfully, setting out the tea things.

"Seems like they was just some unseen hand, a-reachin' up and ketchin' her, and holdin' her down — don't it, Miss Lola?" The maid's eyes grew rounded at the horror of her own idea.

"Nonsense! It was a big nail," answered Lola in as matter-of-fact a tone as she could command. "Her bathing-suit caught on it."

Barbara shivered ostentatiously as she turned away. Lola laughed, Harvey looked disgusted, and Mrs. Dove gave her attention to the teapot.

"Want a cup o' tea, Ag?" called Harvey to the girl in Auntie's bed.

"Yes, I do, and don't call me Ag," was the lusty reply from the unwilling invalid. "And put plenty of sugar in, Harve dear!"

"Sure, Mike," called Harvey, dropping three lumps into the cup which Mrs. Dove handed him.

"Bring more than one cake," shouted the captive.

"Lie still and don't shriek," admonished Mrs. Dove nervously. "Harvey's bringing you everything."

Marian was glad that the Spaldings did not seem to expect her to talk. She felt better after sitting quietly and sipping her tea. Mrs. Dove went into the bedroom to expostulate with Agnes, and Marian took the opportunity to rise and say that she must go.

"I know you're anxious to get home. It's been a good deal of a strain," said Lola. Then, quite unexpectedly, she kissed Marian on the cheek. Tears sprang to Marian's eyes; and Harvey looked away.

The boy went down with her to the dock, and unfastened her boat, holding to the rope while she got in and settled herself. "Are you too tired to row?" he asked gravely. "If you are, I'll row over, and we can tow the *Paloma*."

"Oh, no! I'm perfectly all right," Marian responded hastily. She really wanted to be alone. He looked at her searchingly to see whether she meant what she said. Her hair was still wet and shining; her eyes were dark and shy.

"I can't tell you how I — how we — feel, about what you did," he stammered. All his jaunty ease was gone.

"I don't want to be told." Marian was staring at the water. "You took some trouble to save the marsh-hen that was caught in the vine,— and you didn't want to be praised for it."

"You've got the idea," smiled Harvey. "Nuff said." He stood watching her as she rowed away.

Marian did not tell her mother of her adventure. She felt that she would rather wait until she felt calmer about it herself. She went up to her room and rested and dried her hair more thoroughly than she had had a chance to do.

While Marian was putting up her hair, Mrs. Frear came into the room with a box. "Mr. Grant brought your shoes," she said. "Did you have a good time with the Spaldings?"

"Yes, a fine time! Oh, Mother, supposing they shouldn't fit." Marian put in the last hairpin, and turned a worried face to her mother.

"They're sure to fit," prophesied Mrs. Frear. "You gave him the number, and everything."

"Yes, I know. But it's so important that they should fit, Mummy dear." The girl was fumbling in a drawer for a pair of white stockings, and Mrs. Frear was untying the string on the parcel. When at last Marian slipped her foot into the slender white pump, she found that all was well, and that the fit was perfect. Tired as she was, she spun about on tiptoe, rejoicing in this "genteel" addition to her wardrobe. She opened the tin box of "Blanco" for cleaning the shoes, and sniffed at the paste. "Now I can look like a real person," she exclaimed. Lola wore white shoes most of the time,

and Marian had seen them, freshly cleaned, sitting on a sunny edge of the porch, to dry.

"I'm so glad you like them." Mrs. Frear looked relieved, for she knew the tragedy of ill-fitting shoes, when one was too far away from town to exchange.

"Mother," said Marian meditatively, studying the tips of the pumps.

"What?"

"I've thought and thought — do you suppose I could go to Willford to school next winter?"

Mrs. Frear looked surprised. "Why, yes, dear, probably you could, if you were willing to believe it — and would go alone."

"I won't go alone," answered Marian. "I mean, could *we* go to Willford, and could *I* go to school?"

Mrs. Frear's face was dubious. "Just what did you have in mind?" she asked.

"Well, I thought we might take a room or two, and live there together. We have to eat, wherever we are. And the wood costs so much, and the feed for the cow and the chickens; if we used that money to pay rent for the rooms,—" Marian hesitated, lest her scheme should be too wild.

"That's a possibility," admitted the older lady. "But how about harvesting things in the fall, and getting the seeds in, in the spring — and my jam and catsup that I have such a good sale for? You see, we can't cut off our income."

"I know. But maybe there would be some way," quavered Marian desperately.

"I could stay here alone until things were finished

in the fall, and come back again in the spring —" Mrs. Frear suggested.

"No, no! I couldn't have you here alone. I couldn't study. I couldn't do anything."

"Maybe I could get Ella Erickson to stay with me for her board."

"She's only ten; and she'd be in school all day," Marian objected; "and it would be one more to feed." The girl sighed, still staring at the new white shoes. "Mother, there must be some way of working it out, so that I could learn and you could be with me."

Mrs. Frear regarded her daughter earnestly, glad to see her mood of determination and hope. "Probably there is," she agreed. "I suppose we've accepted the *cant's* too long. "Now we ought to be looking at the *cans*."

"I think so, too, mother," Marian began to take off the new shoes and the white stockings. "I'm going to continue to think and think."

CHAPTER VII

UNDER THE PINE TREES

ON Monday morning at breakfast, between the oatmeal and the scrambled eggs, Marian told her mother about her adventure with Agnes Spalding, under water.

Her mother's hand was unsteady as she set down the dish of eggs, without helping herself. "Oh, Marian!" was all she said. She sat looking at her daughter absently, as if she were visualizing something dreadful. Then commanding herself she asked, "Was it very bad — for you, I mean?"

"It was, rather," answered Marian. "I thought once or twice that I couldn't manage it — for either of us. But it came out all right," she added. "Mother, take some of the egg. The toast is getting cold. Mrs. Dove was nice to me — and Lola kissed me. That was worth something, wasn't it?"

"A good deal."

Breakfast went on in silence, and the two women soon sought their own tasks. Marian had the indoor work to-day, while her mother attended to the chickens, and picked the last of the strawberries — the belated ripening, after rain and sun.

Marian washed the dishes, cleaned the cupboards, swept, and then washed out her few blouses and bits of lace, a white petticoat and a camisole. While she

worked, she thought about "nice clothes," and how it would seem to have them. For all her housewifely skill, Mrs. Frear was indifferent to clothes, and had not much knack of making a little show off for more than it was, or for imparting a modish turn to a dull bit of goods. "If mother —" thought Marian; but she checked herself. "Mother is a marvel, as it is," she murmured, "and I don't know why I should expect more of her." She found herself singing, as she rinsed and blued. "Some day, some day, I'll have all the pretty things I want," she chanted. "Some time, some time!"

She went out into the sunshine to hang up the clothes. Her mother's faded blouse and sunbonnet were visible over the bushes in the far corner of the garden. Affixing a clothespin, Marian heard a whoop. Turning, she saw "Aunt Elsie" and Harvey Spalding coming up the path from the lake. Mrs. Dove was holding up her blue linen skirt, above a frilled petticoat. Under a hat with a black scarf, her blond hair gleamed in the sun. She wore a coral velvet bow at the V of her bodice. In a hand loosely gloved with white, she held a basket suggestive of marketing.

"Hello! Aren't you afraid a blackbird will snip off your nose?" called Harvey.

"I hope not, for I haven't much to lose," retorted the girl pertly. She was sometimes remarkably at her ease with Harvey.

"It wouldn't be a bad thing if blackbirds snipped off saucy boys' tongues," said Mrs. Dove with mock severity.

"I haven't any to lose, either," said the lad as

they came closer. "But I'm glad I have enough to tell our good news with."

"What is it?" queried Marian, dropping her bag of clothespins.

"Father's coming — this afternoon, late." The young man glowed. "We just got the letter." The Spaldings had a "Rural Delivery" box on the road a quarter of a mile beyond their cottage.

"Oh, that's splendid," Marian cried, properly impressed.

"Don't imagine that it's his father only, that he's so pleased about," Mrs. Dove said teasingly. "It's really something else."

"It *is* father, too," Harvey defended himself; "but the fact that he's bringing a car with him doesn't make him any the less welcome."

"Oh — you mean an automobile?" asked Marian.

"Yes, he'll hire one to drive out with, and keep it a few days. He'll give us a good spin while he's here."

Mrs. Frear was now making her way toward the visitors. Mrs. Dove set down her basket, and took the other woman's hand. "This girl of yours did us a good turn on Saturday," she said in her impetuous way. "We never can thank her, of course."

"I'm glad she was able to rise to the occasion," said Mrs. Frear quietly.

"This time she had to sink to the occasion," said Harvey, *sotto voce,* grinning at Marian. The two older women did not hear this frivolous remark, but were going on with their conversation about Agnes's narrow escape.

"Won't you come into the house?" asked Mrs. Frear, after a minute.

"No, I love it out here. I'll sit on the chopping-block." Mrs. Dove sat down and spread her skirts about her. Mrs. Frear found a seat on a little pile of wood. "Harvey, run on and get the things for the stew," commanded "Auntie"; then, turning to her hostess, "We're going to have a real old-fashioned Irish stew for lunch. The meat is cooking, and Barbara wants the vegetables. We could have got on, but we didn't have an onion — not an onion. What's an Irish stew without 'the third ingredient'?"

Harvey and Marian went to pull the onions and carrots. "You'll like father," said the boy. "I guess you've heard his praises sung often enough. He's one of those people who are quiet and don't put themselves in the lime-light, and you don't always know how fine they are until you've seen 'em quite a lot."

"That's the best kind," said Marian. "How is Agnes to-day?"

"Gay as a cricket; her experience in the water didn't hurt her a bit. How are you?"

"I? Oh, I'm all right — perfectly," answered Marian, surprised that any one should ask.

"You had a kind of a hard time, though, didn't you?" asked the lad, his hands full of onions.

Marian bent over the row of green blades. "It was hard for a minute or two," she admitted. "Do you think this will be enough? Your aunt is in a hurry to get things to cooking. Stew needs to be cooked a long time."

"It wasn't the stew that she was so interested in," Harvey replied; "she wanted to meet your mother, and say thank you."

"Oh." Marian thought that quite enough had been said about her life-saving adventure.

"This will be enough for the present," Harvey remarked. "Oh, say, why don't you come back with us? The lake is glorious this morning."

"Maybe I could," Marian said, considering the day's tasks. "I couldn't stay very long."

"You'll enjoy being on the lake. It's like glass," exulted Harvey. "Come on."

They went back to where Mrs. Frear and Mrs. Dove were still talking. The arrangement was quickly made, and Marian hurried with the others down to the landing. She and Harvey rowed, while Mrs. Dove sat in the stern, towing Marian's boat.

"Won't you stay to lunch?" asked Mrs. Dove, when they reached the Spaldings' pier.

"No, thank you," said Marian. "I must get back."

Agnes came bounding up to them, as they neared the porch. "Here, dear," said Mrs. Dove, "take these things to Barbara, that's a — well, take them, anyway. Tell her we brought them as soon as we could."

Agnes took the basket, but hesitated, putting her hand on Marian's arm, with a quick grateful look. "It's nice that you came," she said. Marian felt the warmth of the younger girl's tone, and liked Agnes better than she had liked her before. "Lola's out gathering pine cones," the girl went on. "She wants some perfectly grand fires in the fire-

place, when father comes, if the weather is cool enough; and Barbara's making a cake a yard high, with marshmallow filling — that's father's favorite."

Marian went out to the hillside, where she could see Lola's rose-colored smock under the dark pine boughs. "May I help you weed your cabbages?" she asked as she came near.

"I should say!" laughed Lola. "But you'll get your hands all pitch."

"Kerosene takes it off," the other replied.

"So we discovered. Your hair looks lovely this morning." Lola gazed critically at the result of her instructions.

"I did the best I could with it." Marian knelt on the slippery brown pine needles, and began to pick up cones, putting them into the large basket which Lola had brought out. "How nice the pine smells, with the sun shining on it."

"I love it. It makes me think of mother," Lola replied.

"Did she — like it, too?"

Lola was on her knees beside the basket. "Once she and I were up in Northern Wisconsin, in the pine woods," she explained. "Father thought it might be good for her health. I was only eleven, but I went along to keep her company. We stayed at a little hotel on a lake. It was sort of lonesome, and she and I used to sit out on the rocks in the afternoon, and read and talk. The smell of the pines was like this — strong and sweet." Marian, not knowing what to say, kept silent. "That was the last summer she — stayed with us," Lola went on in a low voice. She was crouching on the hillside, and

looking out through the low lacy branches, at the lake.

"I — I'm so sorry," began Marian, whose words of consolation were few.

"She was such a dear," Lola was saying —"so happy always, and so — *honest,* if you know what I mean. She always told us that we need never be afraid of the truth. I'm so thankful that she gave us all a good start — showed us that we must like people, and not think we were better than others, and not judge too harshly. Not that we live up to her teaching, by any means," she added hastily. "We squabble like fury, and we say awfully mean things sometimes. But we do try, anyway, and that's something."

The two girls had stopped picking up the cones, and Lola was digging into the ground with a twig. "She must have been splendid," stammered Marian.

"She was. She was so interested in women," Lola began again. "I hope you don't mind — I like to talk about her." Marian shook her head. "She used to say that women ought to stand by each other better. I was such a youngster that I didn't understand, but I suppose I'll see more of what she meant, as time goes on. She said that women were often unkind to one another,— that they were the ones who made the hard and fast rules of society — caste, and all that — and tried to make some people think they weren't as good as others; I mean, for other reasons than behavior — money or relatives, or something like that."

"That's so unfair," exclaimed Marian hotly.

"Yes, it is. I remember mother's saying that

women did those things through fear — they thought somebody might get something away from them, if they didn't hang on tight."

"It's foolish when you think of it, isn't it?" said Marian meditatively.

"It surely is." Lola began to pick up the cones again. "I hope I'll never get to be like that."

"I don't think there's any danger. Do you know," said Marian confidentially, "I was awfully scared for fear you people were going to be uppish. I guess it was because I'd have been so disappointed if you had been. I was just *aching* to know some young people."

"It's hard to tell what people are going to be like," ruminated Lola. "Now, that Carl Erickson that hauled our things told us that the folks around here were mostly Danes. And he said"— she hesitated, smiling —" that you and your mother were 'queer.' We were awfully surprised when we found that you weren't."

Marian grew red. "I suppose we do seem queer to him," she said. "And he told a man I know that you were loud and ill-mannered, and that you made fun of people behind their backs."

"How silly!" cried Lola indignantly. "I hope you didn't believe it."

"No, we knew it wasn't so, after we'd seen you once or twice."

By this time the girls had curled up comfortably on the sloping bank, with their feet under them. "We try to behave ourselves," said Lola. "Harvey goes around singing and shouting a good

deal, but he's a nice brother. We think he's all right,— though he has his faults, too."

"I hadn't noticed them," said Marian politely.

"Probably not, at this stage. But he does leave his things around, just terribly — strews them all over the house. Isn't it odd how he can be so fussy to have everything just right in a laboratory, and then string his belongings around anyhow, at home?"

"It is funny," admitted Marian. "I suppose boys are like that."

"Well, Harvey's the oldest," Lola continued, "and mother babied him — especially after she thought she was — leaving us; and he got careless during the time we had the housekeepers; and Aunt Elsie lets him do just about as he pleases, anyhow. I often tell her that he's her pet. She's easy-going, and hates fusses and squabbles."

"I don't blame her," commented Marian, who, having no brothers and sisters, was vaguely troubled at the idea of a home where "fusses and squabbles" could take place.

"Oh, well," retorted her companion, "you've always been the only child, and you couldn't very well quarrel with a lady like your mother; but if you had to hold your own in a family of brothers and sisters, and not get run over and trampled out of sight, you'd see things differently. You're as sensitive as any human being can be —"

"Am I?" Marian looked astonished. "Oh, I suppose I am. I'm sorry. I'm going to grow a skin that can't get hurt."

"You'd have to, if you had a brother irritating you and teasing you, and a sister telling you painful truths. Even so, you'd probably have a wrangle or two with 'em in the meantime."

"Of course you're right," sighed Marian; "but I shouldn't enjoy it, all the same."

"No, one doesn't. After you've had a 'spat,' and got over it, you wonder what it was all about. It always seems silly — especially of the other person — to get peeved over something so insignificant."

"I can see —'especially the other person,'" Marian laughed. "I've had enough to do with youngsters at school to know that. And I have as bad a temper as any one, only I don't get it stirred up so often."

Lola looked at her thoughtfully. "I can see that you have the 'poetic temperament,' as Auntie says."

"I'm not sure that I know what that is," Marian faltered.

"It's having such a sensitive soul that you think you're a blighted being, if things go wrong. Now you've often thought yourself a blighted being, haven't you?" Lola spoke half seriously and half teasingly.

Marian did not know whether to be hurt or not. Then she met the twinkle in Lola's eyes, and began to laugh. "Yes, of course I have — lots of times," she assented. "And more this summer than ever before — until you came."

"Not since, I suppose?"

"A little. But it's been so much better — except that I was so awkward and scared at first. Before you came, I was so lonesome for girls, and so afraid

of not knowing anybody — *ever* — or getting anywhere. It will never be quite so bad again — and you'll come back?"

"Oh, of course!" exclaimed Lola. "We're coming back every summer."

"Every summer! I wonder if I'll be here — forever?" queried Marian, speaking to herself.

"I hope so. I mean, I hope you'll be here in the summer when we're here. But I hope you'll go away during the winter, if you want to so awfully much."

"I do." After a pause, Marian said in a low voice, "How would you like staying here all winter, with the snow three feet deep, and the storms howling round the house, and the thermometer down to twenty below zero, and nobody in sight for days?"

"I— I —" Lola gasped and stammered, looking a bit frightened.

"And you'd have to plow your way through the snow, to get out and feed the chickens and milk the cow and bring in the wood; and you'd have to keep stuffing the stove all day, just to keep the house passably warm —"

"It would be rather awful," murmured Lola, playing nervously with a spray of green pine needles.

"It is," said Marian grimly. Then she changed her tone. "But there's another side to it. It's beautifully cozy and quiet, with just your mother and you —"

"*My* mother and me," whispered Lola.

"I mean my mother and me. The room is warm, and there's the smell of baking; and pussy sits under the stove with her toes tucked in; and there's lacework on the windows, and you can see the long

bluish lake, with the dark trees — oh, I can't make you feel it,— there's no use."

"Oh, yes, you can. It's beautiful," said Lola slowly. "I can't see why that isn't just as good as a lot of people, and the everlasting running in and out that one has in town."

The girls paused, contemplating the problem which older people have found perplexing — how to conform one's life to a happy medium, with enough companionship, and not too much.

"I guess it's just as you look at it," ventured Marian.

"Harvey says he gets tired of the doorbell and the telephone, and the yip-yapping of a lot of girls," smiled Lola. "When Agnes and I get to — well, arguing, he always says in a loud tone, 'Oh, for a lodge in a garden of cucumbers!' I don't see any sense in that."

"It's in the Bible, I think," said Marian, wrinkling her forehead.

"Is it?" Lola stared. "Then I don't see how he got hold of it. Cucumbers! I can't see what they would be in the Bible for."

"Me, either," confessed Marian cheerfully. "But doesn't Harvey bring in a lot of boys to yip-yap, too?"

"Oh, yes, but they shut themselves up in his room to perform some experiment, or talk about football, or — I don't know what they do find to talk about. You'd think they'd get it all said, after a while, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, I don't know," evaded Marian. "It must keep your aunt quite busy, looking after all of you."

"Yes, it does, really. Auntie thinks it's rather a hardship to have to hang around and keep an eye on us. She has a friend who wants her to go to Morocco with her."

"Morocco?" Marian wondered why any one should be consumed with a desire to go there.

"She loves to travel, and of course lately she hasn't had much chance. It is a little hard on her. People think sometimes that Auntie is frivolous because her hair is light and fluffy, and because she loves high-heeled shoes and bright colors," Lola ran on, "but she's just as nice and simple as she can be, down in her heart. We're all awfully fond of her."

"I should think you would be," Marian agreed. "We aren't getting on very fast with the pine cones, are we?"

"Oh, dear, no!" Lola began to pick up cones. "I wanted a lot, to make a lovely fire for the Best-Father-in-the-World."

"Well, we'll hurry." Marian was scrambling about on the slippery bank, and reaching for the fat pitchy cones.

"And we have had a good old talk, haven't we?" Lola queried, hard at work.

"Just fine." Marian looked her happiness at the progress which their friendship had made.

"And I want you to meet father as soon as possible, after he comes," Lola remarked, shifting the basket to a new area of cones.

The next afternoon, Marian was rowing home from the mouth of the creek, where she had gone to get some water-cress. She saw the *Paloma* on the

other side of the lake, and heard a whoop of greeting. After a moment, she realized that the boat was coming toward her, and that she was expected to meet it. She turned the prow of her boat toward the *Paloma,* glancing over her shoulder now and then at the familiar forms and one which was unfamiliar. "It's Mr. Spalding," she said to herself in trepidation.

The boats were now nearing each other, and Harvey called out, "We want you and father to meet."

With nervous motions, Marian brought her boat alongside the other. In the *Paloma,* with Harvey and Lola and Agnes, sat a man of forty-five or -six, with dark eyes, and smooth-shaven face. "Agnes looks more like him than the others," Marian thought, as her eyes met his. He was dressed as for an outing, in gray flannel shirt, khaki trousers, and canvas puttees. In the bottom of the boat were fishpoles, a bait-pail, and a tackle-box.

"Father, this is Marian Frear; Marian Frear, this is father," said Lola in a free and easy way.

"How do you do?" Marian hardly dared raise her eyes to this strange man, so different from the men who lived in that part of the world.

"I'm glad to meet you, Miss Frear," he said heartily, reaching a strong hand over the edge of the boat. "I've heard all about you."

As she put her hand into Mr. Spalding's, Marian wondered what the three young people had been saying about her, but she felt comforted with the assurance that it could not be anything very bad. "You've helped my flock to get something to eat,"

Mr. Spalding was going on, "and tremendously good things, too. I don't know what they would have done if it hadn't been for you — in more ways than one."

"I'm glad we can let them have the things," said Marian. It did not occur to her until afterward that "in more ways than one" referred to what she had done for Agnes.

"Father just loves it here," Agnes piped joyously.

"I'm very much taken with it," assented Mr. Spalding. "It's so shut in."

That was just what Marian could not endure, but she said nothing. Harvey supplemented his father's words with, "There aren't a lot of resorters yip-yapping around."

("That must be his favorite word," thought Marian.)

"Yes, one can go about in old clothes, and loaf and fish, and there isn't a sound but a peep now and then from a kingfisher or a cat bird," Mr. Spalding remarked. "It certainly is a rest, after a man has been staying in hotels, and traveling around on trains full of crying babies and chattering misses." He looked over at Lola, and smiled.

"This is a poor place to get away from chattering misses," retorted Lola. "But you knew that when you came."

Marian began to swing her boat around toward home, answering with a nod Lola's wave of the hand, and Harvey's flourish of an oar. She had hardly said a word, and yet the courtesy of the others had been such that she felt as if she had thoroughly entered into the conversation.

"We always have a high old time when father comes," shrilled Agnes, looking at the big smiling man with affectionate admiration.

"He's a nice father," thought Marian. "Fathers must be wonderful!" She had not thought much about that until now. She rowed on, absorbed in thinking what a great thing it must be to have a father to come home, and to bring one gifts, and to be loved and admired. As she laid the water-cress on the table, she said to her mother, "Mr. Spalding was out in the boat with the Spaldings — Harvey and the girls, I mean."

"What sort of man is he?" asked Mrs. Frear.

"You'll probably see him. He's sort of big and nice. I never thought before how wonderful it must be to have a father — living," Marian replied.

Mrs. Frear was silent for a minute, looking out through the swinging branches of the grapevine. "It would have been different if he had lived," she said sadly; and then with her accustomed fortitude, she added, "but what we have to do is to make the best of life as it is."

CHAPTER VIII

A QUESTION OF CLOTHES

MARIAN heard a *whoo-hoo* from the meadow, and ran down the path to meet Lola Spalding. "What do you think?" cried Lola, as the two girls came upon each other at the bars. "Father wants us to go to the Grand View Hotel, on the other lakes, for supper, or dinner, rather — they have it at night, of course. We're to take a ride in the car, and then go to the Hotel for dinner, and then stay to look at the dancing." Lola's cheeks were flushed with excitement and hurry.

"Oh, that will be great. I'm sure you'll enjoy it," answered Marian cautiously. She did not know what Lola implied.

"I thought you understood — we want you to go along."

"I — me?" Marian looked happy and frightened.

"Yes, of course. You'll go, won't you?"

"Why-y —" Marian's face fell. "I'd like to, just awfully, but —"

"Oh, don't say you won't. But what?" Lola spoke impatiently.

"I haven't anything to wear." There was a choke in Marian's throat.

"Nonsense!" cried Lola. "Anything will do."

"But I haven't 'anything.'"

Lola wrinkled her forehead. "Not a little white dress of some kind?"

"No. I had a white muslin, but it got too small, and went all to pieces. I haven't had a chance to get one, and besides — the expense." Tears stood in the country girl's eyes. It was humiliating to have to confess the slenderness of one's wardrobe.

"But you can take one of mine!" Lola glowed with the idea.

"Oh, no." Marian shrank back. "I wouldn't take yours."

"Why not?"

"Something might happen to it."

"Pooh! Nothing could."

"Well, something might"; Marian's voice was firm.

"It wouldn't make any difference."

"It would to me."

"Oh, but, Marian, I want you to go." Lola put her arm around the other girl's waist.

"I'd love to. I never go anywhere. And to take the ride, and go to a Hotel — it would be beautiful," Marian returned slowly. "But I'll have to give it up." She dug the toe of her shoe into the damp soil.

"You sha'n't give it up. We'll *make* you a dress." Lola spoke with inspiration.

"Oh!" Marian was startled.

"You know I make a lot of my own things," Lola explained.

"Oh, do you?"

"Of course. What am I taking the Household Arts course for?"

Marian looked at Lola perplexedly. "But what would you make it of?" she asked.

"Couldn't we buy something in the village?" ventured Lola.

"They don't have anything there. And besides, I don't like to ask mother for the money. I've — just bought some shoes." Marian faltered. It was hard to have to talk about such things to Lola Spalding, who had everything she needed.

"I know. I'd feel that way, too," the other assented. "Now, let's see. I know a girl who made a good-looking dress out of a window curtain."

Marian smiled wanly. "I don't believe we could spare any," she said, "and anyway, they aren't *nice*."

"And I know some one who made a lovely gown out of an old linen sheet," Lola hazarded.

Marian looked up quickly. "A linen sheet!" she exclaimed. "Why, mother has a lot of those — woven by hand, years ago, you know."

"Oh, they're wonderful. That would be perfect. But will she —?"

"I don't know. I think so. Mother would do anything for me," said Marian. "She keeps those sheets put away — they're so heavy to wash and iron."

"Dare you ask her?" queried Lola breathlessly.

"Surely I dare." The two girls dashed up to the house, and into the sitting-room, where Mrs. Frear was "stemming" tiny cucumbers for pickles. "Mother!"

The lady looked up at the two flushed girlish faces. "What is it?" she asked placidly.

"Do we have to coax?" asked Lola, looking at

Marian. "My mother used to say that coaxing never did any good."

"No, we don't have to," responded Marian. "Mother, the Spaldings want me to go with them to the Hotel on Clear Lake, and stay for dinner, and everything. They're going in an automobile. When is it, Lola?"

"Father said it could be to-day or to-morrow. We'll make it to-morrow," Lola replied eagerly.

"It sounds beautiful," said Mrs. Frear; but a shadow rested on her face. "Well?"

"I haven't anything to wear, you know," finished Marian.

"I know, dear. You haven't much. But —" Clothes never seemed of vital importance to Mrs. Frear.

"We're going to make her a dress," announced Lola.

"If we can," added Marian.

"Out of what?" Mrs. Frear's busy hands were still, over the pan of cucumbers.

"That's just where the coaxing comes in." Lola smiled with a tinge of anxiety.

"I can't think of anything that I have that would do," said Mrs. Frear, almost frowning. "Long ago, I cut up everything that I had, for Merry."

"Not everything, mother. There's something left — those old linen sheets; you know you have a lot."

"A sheet! That sounds odd." Mrs. Frear looked puzzled. "Yes, I have seven or eight. But would they do?"

"*Would* they? I should say so," cried Lola.

"It seems a pity to cut one up — but it would wear a long time."

"I'll get one." Mrs. Frear rose and went to a closet under the stairs, and brought out a pile of linen. "Look these over, and see if you can find what you want," she said.

The girls swooped down upon the pile on the table. "Here! This is just the thing," Lola exulted.

"This is a little coarser and thinner," suggested Marian.

"Yes it is, and a lovely creamy color. Oh, let's take this!" Lola held up the long smooth folds.

"But are you sure —" Mrs. Frear looked rather dubious.

"Yes, yes, I have a pattern, and I know how," Lola reassured her.

"But a machine? Mine is so old that it will hardly work."

"We have one of those hand-running machines — don't you know?" Lola made vigorous motions, as if she were turning a wringer. "It goes this way."

"Dear me, I never saw one. What next?" sighed Mrs. Frear.

"Oh, we'll do it in a jiffy. Can you spare Marian?"

"Surely, for a while."

The two girls hurried to the landing, and the *Paloma* fairly flew to the Nest of the Pigeons. Lola had rowed over alone, for the first time. The sheet was now securely wrapped up, in the bottom of the boat.

In Lola's room, they laid the material out on the

bed. Lola rummaged for a pattern, found it, clapped it down here and there, and beamed exultantly. "Yes, there's plenty," she said with relief. "We'll make one of those straight jumper-effects — open, with straps across, under the arms, and then you can wear any kind of waist with it. And we'll make sleeves on a sham-waist, too, if we have enough — sleeves of the linen, I mean."

It was incredible how quickly the pieces were cut out and basted together. Marian stood staring. Aunt Elsie came in, heard the news, and grew enthusiastic. With firm, skillful hands, she assisted with the pinning and basting. "It will be charming," she predicted.

When the fitting had been completed, Aunt Elsie took the skirt and Lola the jumper to finish. "I never saw any one work so fast," marveled Marian. "But what can I do?"

"You can sew the sham-waist together," said Lola. "I think we can find some muslin for it. And now we've got to think about trimming or finishing, or something."

"I wonder?" mused Mrs. Dove. "It ought to have just a little of something very nice — hand embroidery, or real lace, or something. This old hand-woven linen is too nice for anything like a make-shift, you know." Her shapely hand smoothed the creamy stuff with real affection.

"Mother has quite a lot of old lace —" Marian suggested. "I shouldn't wonder if some of it would do."

"It probably would — more than do," Mrs. Dove glowed. "It would have to be something not too

fine — Cluny, or heavy Irish crochet, or something like that."

"I'll bring some over to-morrow, if mother has any that will do, and if she wants me to take it," said Marian.

"This will be finished to-morrow forenoon, and then we can put on the lace," said Lola.

"You mustn't stay in all day, sewing for me," Marian expostulated.

"No, we're going out with father this afternoon," Lola reassured her. "He's out with Harvey and Agnes now."

Marian was stitching up the seams of the underblouse, while the others busied themselves deftly at their tasks. She was thinking how fortunate it was that she had the white shoes. "Mother thought of them just in time," she meditated.

"I was just wondering about a hat," said Mrs. Dove in her happy way, against which no one could take offense. "Do you have a light hat that you can wear with this?"

"Yes, I have a cream-colored straw, with a wide brim," Marian answered. "I haven't worn it a great deal, but the ribbon faded so that it doesn't look nice."

"I should think it would do beautifully," Mrs. Dove said with satisfaction. "You bring it over to-morrow, and we'll do something with it. You know, Lola, there are those poppies on that big hat of mine. I thought I'd take them off and put on one of my blue plumes, to match my Georgette dress. I should think the poppies would be very becoming to Marian."

"They would, with her dark hair," Lola replied, taking careful basting-stitches on a facing.

Marian went home in a state of inner excitement. She was going to have a new dress, and a new hat, and look well, and have a good time, "like other girls." Her mother listened with delight to the account of proceedings, and brought out a box of treasures saved from earlier days. "I have some heavy laces here, I'm sure," she said, turning over the contents of the box — embroideries and rufflings and edgings all more or less yellowed by time. "Now this would do, don't you think?" She held up some pieces of rather coarse Cluny lace, sewed into a little pile with a blue thread. Ripping the thread, she displayed some "insets" or medallions of an attractive pattern, with some strips and fragments of edge and insertion to match. "I believe this is just the thing," she exclaimed. "It's some that I had on a linen jacket, myself, when I was a girl."

"Oh, it's lovely, mother," Marian cried. "I've seen it before, in that little bundle, but I never looked at it. You have a picture of yourself, in that jacket, haven't you?"

"Yes, I believe I have." Mrs. Frear smiled reminiscently, as she looked at the bits of lace. She went to an old inlaid box which stood on a small table in the corner, and took out some photographs. "Here it is," she remarked, holding out a card to Marian. The girl took it, and smiled to see the odd puffed sleeves and narrow waist of the pictured costume, and the fresh happy face above it.

"There are the very medallions, and the edging,"

she burst out excitedly. "You can see the pattern. It's the same, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is, I'm sure," Mrs. Frear answered.

"And how nice and pleased you look, mother," Marian went on. "But what a funny jacket, with those sleeves all puffed out at the shoulder, and small down at the wrist."

"'Leg-o'-mutton,' some people call them," Mrs. Frear responded. "That was the height of style in those days. I thought myself wonderfully well dressed."

"It's a silly style," scoffed Marian. "But you would have looked nice in anything. Anyhow, I like my new dress better."

"I think, from your description, that it will look very attractive, and very much in the mode"; Mrs. Frear put the photograph away, and closed the box of trimmings. "Wrap your lace up in paper, and then we'll take a look at your hat," she said.

After the faded ribbon was removed, the hat proved to be in good condition. Mrs. Frear wiped it carefully with alcohol on a flannel cloth, so that it looked clean and fresh. She set it on the girl's head. "I always liked it on you," she said encouragingly. "I'm sure it will do splendidly."

Marian was up early the next morning, to get some work done before she went over to Pigeon's Nest. When she started away, with the lace and the hat, her conscience was clear, and her heart elated.

Mr. Spalding was sitting on the porch, reading a magazine, and she had a little talk with him before she went up to Lola's room. It was merely about the lake, and fishing, and the weather, and the plans

for the evening, but it gave the girl a sense of equality and comradeship with the kindly man, so that she comprehended the enthusiasm which his children felt for him.

Mrs. Dove and Lola greeted the lace with cries of satisfaction. "The very thing!" beamed Lola, flourishing the medallions in the air.

"Perfect," added Mrs. Dove, "color and quality and everything." She loved laces, especially old ones, with a flavor of human interest.

There were a few moments of discussion as to the best way of disposing of the lace, and then nimble fingers began to set it in and sew it on. Even Marian's unpracticed eye saw how well it went with the linen, and how it added to the appearance of the dress. When the gown was ready to try on, she slipped into it with a gasp of delight.

"It's lovely," cried Mrs. Dove, standing back and appraising the success of the work, her golden head held at a critical angle. "It's really a beauty. I've seen many a dress from Paris that didn't look so nice."

Marian was trying to see herself all at once in the dresser-glass. The dress did look amazingly well to her.

"Of course it will have to be pressed and freshened," conceded Lola, "but I do think, though 'I say it as shouldn't,' that it's a grand success. It honestly is, isn't it, Auntie?"

"My dear! that dress would cost — well, I don't dare say how much, on Michigan Boulevard," Mrs. Dove replied; "handwoven linen, and real lace and a lot of hand-sewing — you don't get those for

nothing." She patted Marian on the shoulder. "You look as nice as a peach in it, too," she assured the girl. "You carry yourself so well. That's what comes of being out of doors so much, I suppose — and having a long line of good ancestors; we mustn't forget that."

Marian, her head whirling, had a last peep at herself before she took the dress off. There were a few last stitches to take, and then the hat claimed attention. A black velvet ribbon, whisked out of a drawer, covered a tiny broken place, and some marks of stitches. The poppies were pinned on at a modest and yet effective angle. "Fine!" Mrs. Dove exclaimed. "Just as I thought. They're immensely becoming."

"You're a dear." Lola squeezed Marian's arm, and moved the hat to the side a trifle.

"You're more than that," Marian answered, stammering with gratitude, "you and Mrs. Dove, both."

"We love it," said Mrs. Dove calmly. "There's nothing I like better than furbishing things up, and making people look nice. It's been a real pleasure to us."

"It certainly has," corroborated Lola, regarding the happy face of the other girl. "And we're awfully glad we didn't spoil the cloth, and make a botch of it."

"Mrs. Frear is to come over and stay with me this evening, while you're gone," said Mrs. Dove.

"Oh, aren't you going?" asked Marian, taken aback.

"No. Barbara would go into conniptions if she

had to stay here alone. She dislikes it here badly enough anyhow," Mrs. Dove replied. "So somebody has to stay with her, and I really don't care a bit about going. I want the youngsters all to have a good time, and their father is chaperon enough, I'm sure."

"We've wrangled this all out," said Lola, looking at Marian. "Auntie's like a rock when she makes up her mind, no matter how easy she is ordinarily. So she's going to stay at home, and she wants your mother to stay with her. Do you think she will?"

"Why, yes, I'm sure she will," Marian replied. "I was worried about leaving her alone, but we're so used to being there, that we don't mind much."

When Mrs. Frear heard the message which Marian brought, she consented to go over when Marian went in the boat. "It isn't a bit necessary," she protested, "but it will be very pleasant."

"And now — the dress!" Marian unwrapped her parcel, and displayed the gown to the astonished eyes of her mother. "Isn't it grand?"

"It's simple and sweet and pretty," Mrs. Frear agreed, radiant with her daughter's pleasure. "I was so in hopes they wouldn't make it elaborate and — too fussy, you know. It's just right. I'll run and put on my irons."

"You don't regret the sheet, do you, mother?" Marian was turning the dress over and looking at it as if she could never let it go.

"Not the slightest bit, dear."

"It's almost like magic, isn't it?" Marian sighed. "I'll never rest until I learn how to do things like

that, too. Just think! Lola learned to sew at school! I didn't realize that schools taught such useful things."

"It's wonderful, when you think of it," Mrs. Frear assented. "And the kindness of Lola and her aunt, to do this for you!"

"That's more of the magic," Marian responded.

When the dress lay, freshened and pressed and crisp, on the clothes bars, both mother and daughter drew a long breath of happiness and relief. Marian was to be at the Spaldings' dock at half-past four, and so she had merely enough time to rest and bathe and dress. With deliberate care, she did her hair in the way which Lola had taught her, and tucked a net over it, lest it blow too much upon the journey. With hasty fingers, she tied the tapes of petticoat and camisole, and stood breathless, ready for the gown.

Mrs. Frear helped her to slip the skirt over her head. Then the other pieces went on, fitting into place as neatly as could be desired. The straight modish lines of the dress gave an air to her figure which Marian had never thought she could possess; and the hat, well forward, and just a bit on one side, gave the needed touch of color and jauntiness.

"Marian, dear, it truly is charming." Mrs. Frear put her arm around her daughter and kissed her.

Marian was surveying herself in the glass. Now she turned, and her lips were trembling, her eyes full of tears. "It's so nice, mother, to feel right — to have something pretty, like other girls." The tears ran down on the Cluny lace, and Mrs. Frear hastened to wipe them away.

"I'm just as glad for you as I can be, honey-love," she said. "And I feel, somehow, that from now on, things are going to be better." She held the girl's hands closely in hers.

"I feel it, too. I'm certain of it." Marian's face, relaxing from her mood of tearfulness, showed a glow of hope. "There's something ahead for both of us."

"We must hurry. It's almost time. Won't you let me row?" begged Mrs. Frear. "It isn't good for your new dress. You must hold it up from the bottom of the boat, so that it won't get soiled."

"No, mother, I'll row," Marian answered firmly. "I'd hate to sit there like a sack of meal, and let you do the rowing. I think I can tuck my dress up somehow."

"I'm perfectly strong and able, Marian, and you know I'm not old." Mrs. Frear laughed. She was still in the very early forties, straight and fresh-faced, without a wrinkle or a gray hair.

"Of course, I know very well that you aren't, Mummy, but I want to row, just the same."

Mrs. Frear forbore to argue further. "I nearly forgot," she said; "I was going to take this cake and some raspberry jam." She had a spice-cake, wrapped in a towel, and a large glass of jam on the kitchen table. "The Spaldings have been so nice to you that I feel as if I want to do some little thing for them."

Marian was putting her storm rubbers on over her white shoes, because the meadow path and the ground around the landing were moist and oozy. To save the shoes from being soiled by the inside of

the rubbers, she had carefully wrapped each foot in white tissue paper, which stuck up around the rubbers in an odd way. Holding her skirts high, she went down the path, her mother going ahead in plain blouse and skirt, with her ordinary stout ties on her feet.

"Now, I'm going to row, child," Mrs. Frear said with a decided accent, as they neared the landing.

"Mother, I insist —" Marian began. Then they heard a splash of oars, and a cheery *whoo-hoo* from the water. Pushing aside the boughs, they saw Harvey Spalding, in the *Paloma.*

"I thought you wouldn't want to row over, all dressed up," he was saying; "so I came to get you."

Marian gasped, conscious of her rubbers, and the queer-looking ends of paper sticking out from them.

"How good of you!" Mrs. Frear said heartily. "Marian and I were just wrangling as to which should row."

Harvey was in white flannel trousers and silk blouse. His blue serge coat lay on a seat. "I scrubbed out the boat," he explained, as he jumped out, "because we'd been fishing in it; and I put down a carpet — not exactly my coat for you to step on — like Sir Walter Raleigh — but you can have it if you want it." He had said nothing of the change in Marian's appearance, but he now gave her a look of appreciation which made her forget all about the awkwardness of the rubbers. "It was lucky I came, or you might have been wrangling all night, and never got started," he grinned, as he pushed the boat off.

When they reached the other side, they found the

Spaldings in a bustle of departure. The car stood at the side of the house. Mr. Spalding, in a dust coat, was giving a last touch to the "internal workings" of the machine, as Agnes said.

Lola, in a white wash-silk dress, stood with a long gray linen coat on her arm. She wore a small jaunty hat trimmed with blue-bells and rosebuds. Agnes wore a pink batiste dress, with a black sash, and a wide black hat simply trimmed with a fold of silk.

Mrs. Dove greeted Mrs. Frear warmly, and then turned to Marian. "You'll need a dust-coat," she said, "and I have one here for you." She held a blue linen coat for Marian to slip into. The girl buttoned the smart wrap about her with a feeling of luxury. "What a heavenly chain," sighed Mrs. Dove, looking at the old-fashioned gold chain of heavy twisted ropes, around Marian's neck.

Now all was clamor and chatter. Agnes climbed into the front seat with her father. Lola and Marian and Harvey took the back seat. "Good-bye," and "Have a good time," called Mrs. Dove and Mrs. Frear. The car was off, lurching though the wood road, and out into the road through a pasture; soon it found the smoother surface of the main highway.

The ride was a whirl of delight to Marian. Though she was more or less familiar with the country, her opportunities for getting about had been so few that the scenes had almost the freshness of a new landscape. She looked eagerly at the farm-houses and fields, and exclaimed with as great pleasure as the Spaldings, when they came to the

"Indian Crossing," with its picturesque bridge and its glimpse of stream and lake.

Once, when they were going slowly, over a rough bit of road, they passed a scowling shock-headed youth of about nineteen. Harvey raised his hand to his hat in greeting, and Lola nodded. "That's the Erickson fellow who hauled our things for us," said Harvey. Marian turned quickly, but it was too late to speak. She had not noticed who it was at first.

"Oh, dear! I suppose he thinks I meant to be snippy," she sighed to herself, but soon forgot the incident in the happiness of the trip.

The girls had taken off their hats, having provided themselves with nets for their hair, and they enjoyed the cool wind blowing against their faces. For an hour and a half the party sped through the country, and then suddenly the car turned in at the road which led to the Grand View Hotel. This was a spreading white building on a high wooded bank, overlooking a small lake scattered with islands.

The gayety of the scene was a revelation to Merry. Little sailboats skimmed across the lake, the canvas shining like gold in the sun. Girls in white suits were playing tennis with men in duck trousers and silk shirts. Children were running about. Older people, in light gowns and silk or linen suits were walking up and down among the trees, or drinking lemonade on the verandas. In the quieter corners, groups were playing cards, with gravity or frivolity, as the case might be. The light dresses, the chatter and laughter, gave an air of carefreeness and ease which Marian had seldom seen.

There was a long mirror in the ladies' room, where the girls went to freshen themselves. Marian, taking off her coat and patting her hair into place, was startled to see her full-length figure in the glass. "Why, I look as well as anybody!" was her involuntary thought. Even her hands, tanned by her labors in the garden, were no browner than the hands of the tennis players, or of those gay souls who rowed and bathed.

As the group went out to the veranda, Marian said curiously to Lola, "Do these people just spend the whole summer in having a good time?"

"A few of them, maybe," Lola replied, "but I imagine that most of them work hard all the year, and are just having a week or two of vacation. They're trying to get the most out of it that they can."

Marian felt that she would like to know the history of every one: who worked, and who didn't, how they happened to come here, where they got their clothes, "and everything."

She and the Spaldings walked about, looking at the dock, the boats, the few belated bathers, the men selling ice cream cones, and all the details of the lively scene. Being escorted about by two good-looking men made the girls feel greatly at their ease. Marian found that she could laugh and chat with the rest.

Then there was dinner in the big cool dining-room, where a string band was playing, on a vine-draped platform. Marian was a trifle disappointed at the dinner — it wasn't a bit better than she had at home; at least the cooking wasn't. There were more

courses, and the food was handed about by negro waiters, and there was sherbet in glasses in the middle of the meal, and then ice cream in crinkled paper cases at the last. And there was a strangeness about the large round table, and the unaccustomed space and subdued clatter, which gave the country girl the thrill which she desired.

"Let's go to the movies!" said Harvey as they rose from the table. "We haven't seen any for three weeks — maybe more."

"I'm swooning for some movies," echoed Agnes. "I didn't suppose I could live so long without seeing any."

"I think I can stand them," said Mr. Spalding, putting on a mock-martyr air.

"Most of them bore father to tears," Lola explained, "but he endures them for our sake. And anyhow, he's giving this party for us, and he'll have to take the consequences."

Marian wondered how any one could speak so carelessly of the moving pictures. They were a rare treat to her, an evanescent ecstasy, which she hardly ever had the chance to enjoy. She sat enthralled while the varied incidents of an Alaskan tragedy flitted across the screen. "So glad they gave us something cool in this hot weather," whispered Harvey. Marian could scarcely take time for a responsive giggle, lest she should lose an inch of the film. When the villain had been disposed of, and the lovers united, she emerged half dazed into the dusk, her heart singing with romance and the joy of scenic marvels.

It seemed as if she had had all that one could ask

in a few short hours; but the crowning excitement was the dancing in the big lighted pavilion among the trees, at the edge of the hotel grounds. Of course, Marian herself could not dance, but she hardly gave a thought to that deprivation, for the mere privilege of looking on seemed all that she ought to want. The music, the gay silk and muslin dresses, the white arms and shoulders, gauzy scarfs, elaborate *coiffures*, and light tripping slippers, made her feel as if she could listen and look forever.

Harvey danced with Lola; and Marian followed them with her eyes about the room, wondering at their ease in that maze of whirling couples. When he brought Lola back, Harvey turned to Marian. "I wish you could dance," he cried, wiping his forehead. "You must learn."

"I don't know whether I could or not," Marian answered, almost surprised that any one should suggest it.

"Sure you can. The girls'll teach you," Harvey assured her. "You'll learn in no time. It's like falling off a log. Come on, Aggie. Have a whirl!"

Agnes danced away lightly with her partner. She was more dainty and graceful on the dancing-floor than anywhere else. Marian watched her breathlessly, with an unconscious wistfulness in her eyes. She was sitting next to Mr. Spalding. Lola was beyond the chair in which Agnes had been sitting.

"How do you like it?" asked Mr. Spalding genially of his enraptured guest.

"Oh, I love it!" sparkled Marian, adding, "You know I've never seen anything like this, before."

"You've lived there at the lake all your life?" Mr. Spalding questioned her.

"Yes, nearly; ever since I was four years old."

"Well, it's a fine place to live," responded her companion thoughtfully; "but I suppose you're beginning to wonder about getting out."

"Yes, I am wondering a good deal," Marian replied, surprised at the "understandingness" of the man. "It's my education, you know, that I think of. I don't see how I can get along without one."

"In this day and age," said Mr. Spalding, "a person has to have a pretty good education to compete with others." He glanced at her keenly, as she sat watching Harvey and Agnes.

"I know. And then it isn't fair to mother to stay shut away from people all her life. She likes them, and enjoys being with them. She wants me to try to go away to school alone — at Willford, that is; but I don't want to go until we can manage to go together."

"That would be the thing," agreed Mr. Spalding. "You couldn't very well leave her there alone — in the winter, especially."

"That's what I tell her. I *am* right, don't you think?" Marian asked the big man's advice as naturally as if she had known him a long time.

"Yes, I'm sure you are," he answered judicially. "But you'll find a way to manage it," he encouraged her. "Why, when I was a boy, it just seemed to me that everything was against me. I didn't see how I could go to college, any more than I could fly. But somehow, things opened up, and I worked it out. You'll get to school somehow. I'm sure of it."

Before Marian could reply, Lola moved over beside her, and began to talk about the dresses which gyrated about the hall. And then Harvey and Agnes came back; and presently it was time to start for home.

When they left the hall, where the music was still shrilling and beating, they saw that the big white moon had come up over the trees. The shadows were densely black, and vague forms moved among them, emerging now and then into the light in the open spaces between the buildings. The breeze was cool and fresh, so that the girls' linen coats were acceptable as wraps, not merely as protection against the dust. The car bumped out into the road, and whizzed past dark barns, and houses where now and then a feeble yellow light shone. The party in the automobile had little to say, for they were sleepy or under the spell of the moonlight.

It was late in the evening when Mr. Spalding sounded the horn with a loud honk outside Pigeon's Nest. Lola was yawning, and Agnes, now in the back seat, had her head on Harvey's shoulder. Mrs. Dove and Mrs. Frear came to the back door of the cottage, with a *whoo-hoo* of welcome. Mrs. Frear had her wraps on.

"Won't you come in and have a bite with us?" asked Mrs. Dove of Marian.

"No, I know mother would rather go home, and we're all so sleepy," said Marian. "Thank you just as much. And oh! I've had the best time I ever had in my life." She put her arm shyly around Lola, and whispered, "I thank you a thousand times. It's all because of you and the dress!"

"I'm just awfully glad you could come," Lola answered. "It would have been a shame if you hadn't."

With good-nights all around, and a word of thanks to Mr. Spalding, Marian and her mother turned toward the lake. Harvey went down and rowed them home, in spite of the remonstrances of the Frears. "I could bring the *Paloma* back in the morning, before you were up," asserted Marian. "It's too late for you to bother."

"No doubt you could, but I'm not going to let you," the lad replied. "And anyhow, it's a magnificent night to be out. I'm glad of the excuse."

The moon, astonishingly bright, flooded the lake with its cool radiance. In the still, flat expanse the stars were reflected, and the circle of dark trees and underbrush. The quiet dip of the oars rippled the surface and left a faint glittering wake behind the boat. In the treetops, birds twittered sleepily; deeper within the woods, the raccoons chattered in a querulous undertone. Now and again, a frog croaked or a muskrat splashed in the water along the shore. Marian, sitting in the bow of the boat, was alert to scene and sound, and glowing with the remembrance of the happiest time she had ever had.

"And just think," she was saying to herself, "they needn't have taken me if they hadn't wanted to. It wouldn't have made any difference to them. And what a difference it has made to me!" Her throat tightened a little, with her feeling of gratitude to Lola and Mrs. Dove for the kindly interest which had made this happy evening possible.

Mrs. Frear and Marian would not let Harvey

come up to the house with them, for they were not afraid, and had left matches at the back door for immediate use. With a hearty good-night, he pushed his boat away from the landing, and as the two women found the path to the meadow, they heard him singing out upon the lake,

"Shine on, shine on!
Took a little row down Jordan,
Shine on, shine on, O Jee-ru-sa-*lem!*"

CHAPTER IX

THE LUSTER PITCHER

"IT'S a good thing that the weather was clear yesterday." Mrs. Frear sat beside the lamp, a bit of sewing in her fingers. She and Marian had been talking over the events of the day and evening before. Outside, the rain was drumming and splashing; and a cool wet wind blew in from a half-open window.

"It would have been horrible to have to give up the motor-ride and everything, after the dress was made, and I'd set my heart on going." Marian felt as if she could not have borne the disappointment.

"I'm happy that you didn't have to."

There was a meditative silence, and then Marian burst out, "Mother, how have you stood it all these years — working so hard, and going without every blessed thing that you liked and wanted?"

"Not every blessed thing, Merry," corrected Mrs. Frear, smiling over her hemming. "I had one."

"One?" Marian stared. "Oh — me? Well, I must have been anything but a blessing, a good deal of the time."

"*I* thought you were a comfort." Mrs. Frear spoke with a sparkle of remembrance. "It was such a trial for me to let you go to school: it was a long way across the fields, and you were so little

— starting out, carrying your dinner-pail, as brave as could be. I used to go to the edge of the farthest field with you, you remember, and then watch you out of sight. I was always relieved when the Erickson children came along and took you with them."

"Sometimes I didn't want to go at all," said Marian with a grimace, "because the boys were so rough. And I used to cry because Carl Erickson called me 'Miss Dictionary.' The Ericksons were always going on about my using big words."

"The words were just ordinary ones, that you'd heard me use, but perhaps they did sound odd, from such a little girl," Mrs. Frear replied.

"These last two years, since I haven't been going to school, I've realized how lonesome you must have been all day, here, with no one to speak to. If you could have afforded books and magazines, it wouldn't have been so bad."

"Yes, that's the worst deprivation we've had to suffer — being hungry all the time for the printed page."

"People who have libraries to go to all the time, and magazines at home, don't understand how *savage* any one gets for reading, when they can't afford it," cried the girl.

"Well, we got on." Mrs. Frear refused to repine over a seemingly barren past. "And anyhow, if you'd had all the reading you wanted, you probably wouldn't have been willing to study those old French books of mine, these last two years. I'm glad I could give you a start in French, anyhow. I

feel sure that it will help you out when you do get into school."

"When I do!" Marian sighed. Mrs. Frear laid down her hemming, and took up a magazine which the Spaldings had lent them. She turned the pages luxuriously, pausing here and there to read a few lines, or to study a picture. The rain poured down ceaselessly. Big impatient moths were knocking and fluttering against the screens at door and window. Marian caught her breath. "Isn't it wonderful, mother," she said, clasping her hands in her lap, "to know that there's a light in the Craik place — the Spalding place — Pigeon's Nest — and that people are sitting there, breathing, talking, laughing — folks, real folks!"

"Yes, it's beautiful." Mrs. Frear's expressive eyes looked over into her daughter's. "I'm glad for you. It's made a difference. You look different, Merry."

"Merrier?" The girl laughed at her pun.

"Yes, just that."

"I am. But I haven't got over my foolishness yet. What do you suppose I'm worrying about now?" Marian gave an ashamed glance at the loving face beyond the table.

"About their going away," Mrs. Frear said at a hazard.

"Yes, that's it. Only a few more weeks, and then they'll be gone."

"Oh, child," the mother cried reproachfully, "can't you accept the good for the time being, and not look too far ahead?"

"I know I ought to." Marian was fingering the fringe on the table-cover. "I know what you're thinking — that I'm a horrid ungrateful thing, and that I don't trust people enough."

"I didn't say so." Mrs. Frear concealed a smile.

"I heard you thinking it," Marian retorted. "You can think the loudest of any one I ever saw."

"Well, then if you're sure you heard it, why not accept the rebuke?" Mrs. Frear reached over and patted the girl's brown hand. "And now," she said more briskly, "it's getting late, and we were out last night. Time to go to bed." She glanced at the old mahogany clock, which stood upon the mantel, with the silver luster pitcher on one side, and a silver candlestick on the other.

Marian got up and lighted another candle, which she took from a shelf in the store-room. Her fine young face was thoughtful. As she paused at the foot of the stairs, she turned and said, "I'm going to enjoy their company every bit that I can, and not think at all what it will be like when they've gone."

"That's certainly the best way," responded Mrs. Frear. She closed the doors and put out the light, preparing to follow her daughter up stairs.

Sometime during the next afternoon, Mrs. Dove appeared at the kitchen door of the Frears' little home. She was carrying the towel and the marmalade jar which Mrs. Frear had taken over to Pigeon's Nest.

"Come right in," said Mrs. Frear cordially, answering Mrs. Dove's knock.

"What a cozy place you have!" exclaimed "Aunt Elsie," as she stepped inside. Her keen gray eyes flashed over the four walls of the room. It did look pretty, with the grapevine swaying at the window, and the neat shelves where the blue Canton cups stood, and plates ranged on edge. There was a blue denim cover over the table, and on it sat a gray stone jar full of pink and white verbenas.

"Come into the other room," invited Mrs. Frear. "It's cooler in there."

"Well, I should love to sit in this kitchen," sighed Mrs. Dove. "But yes, we'll go into the other room." This was the first time that she had been in the house. She made no comment as she entered the sitting-room, but Marian, who had been at work there, saw the visitor's gaze rest admiringly on the old mahogany table which Lola had praised.

They all sat down, and the talk for a few minutes was about the expedition to Grand View, and about Mr. Spalding's going back to the city. "Does he stay alone while you're up here?" asked Mrs. Frear.

"Yes, he does when he's in town, but he has been gone a good deal this summer," answered Mrs. Dove. "He keeps his room at the house, and goes out for his meals. It's rather hard on him, but he would have us come up here, and enjoy the woods and the water. He thinks it's good for the children."

"So it is," said Mrs. Frear; "and of course it's quite a responsibility for you to bring them up here and take them back safely."

"It is, really," cried Mrs. Dove. "Nobody but

you seems to have understood that. It's actually more of a responsibility than as if they were my own."

"I see what you mean," agreed Mrs. Frear. "It has been quite an undertaking for you to look after three youngsters. I've found it something of a care with one." She gave a teasing glance at Marian.

Mrs. Dove leaned back in her chair, and began to speak rapidly, with the impulsiveness which characterized her. "You see, Agnes was only eleven — just a little girl — when I came to live with them. And they'd had some queer housekeepers — well-meaning women, most of them, but either harsh and hard, or else indifferent and easy. Really, Mrs. Frear, it almost frightened me to take charge of that house and those children."

"I can see how it might," Mrs. Frear assented.

"It wasn't as if I'd had any children of my own," Mrs. Dove was going on. "My husband and I had been free to travel about, and when he died, I felt so restless, I wanted to keep on traveling. And then — after that sort of life — to settle down, and take up the thousand details of a household and a group of growing children —" She gave a gesture of despair. "I don't know how I had the courage to do it."

"I'm sure you must have done it very well," said Mrs. Frear consolingly.

Mrs. Dove sighed. "Not so terribly well, I'm afraid," she confessed. "I hate housekeeping; in my secret soul I do. Of course, I've forced myself to do it fairly decently, but I've neglected a lot of things, too. And then, the children! It takes so

much wisdom to know what to do, doesn't it?" She looked appealingly at the older lady.

"It surely does. As I was saying, I've found it so with one, in these simple surroundings."

"Then you can imagine how I felt, with three, in somebody else's house, and in town, where there were so many unexpected situations always arising."

"Yes, yes, I can get an idea of it," Mrs. Frear nodded. Marian was sitting silent, listening to this new revelation of the Spaldings' household affairs.

"It seems sometimes as if I couldn't go on with it," Mrs. Dove said hesitatingly. "Of course, I love the youngsters; they're perfect dears, in spite of their faults, and they're as good to me as any children could be. But I'm yearning to take a good long journey again — halfway round the world." She stopped, as if she were afraid that she had said too much. "I don't want you to think — I hope I haven't —" she said in a conscience-stricken way. "I do love the children, you know, and I want to do all I can for them."

"We understand perfectly," responded Mrs. Frear. "Everybody can see how devoted you are to them."

There was a space of silence, while Mrs. Dove took breath after her somewhat-regretted speech. While she had been talking, her eyes had more than once wandered to the mantel. Now she turned to it again. "Mrs. Frear," she said, "I just can't keep my eyes off that old silver-luster jug on the clockshelf — it's a choice bit, if there ever was one."

"Oh, that?" answered Mrs. Frear vaguely. "I use it to put odd change in." She rose and lifted it

down. "I'm afraid it's a bit dusty." It was not. "Would you like to look at it?" She shook out some bits of paper and silver, and flicked at the smooth sides of the pitcher with her handkerchief.

Mrs. Dove took the jug into her hands with the loving touch of one who knows and values old china. She sighed. "It's a beauty — the loveliest I've ever seen of this sort. That band of blue, and the landscape are charming. This is a museum piece — did you know it?"

"N-no. I hadn't thought much about it." Mrs. Frear flushed. "I knew it was nice. Grandmother would never let us children touch it. We smashed a good many of her treasures." She smiled again at Marian.

Mrs. Dove shuddered. "Thank heaven, you didn't smash this." She ran her fingers around the edge of the pitcher, and followed the graceful course of the handle. "I suppose —" she stammered, "you wouldn't *sell* this, would you?" She glanced almost timidly at Mrs. Frear from the corner of her eye.

Mrs. Frear started, and looked perplexed. "Would you like it — so much?" she queried, while Marian's eyes sought hers.

"It would be just right to complete a group of things that I'm giving to the Museum in Springfield," said the guest, holding the jug in her lap. "I have plenty of copper-luster, and some silver, too, but this would set the whole group off! I'd like it just tremendously." Her voice was appealing, and her eyes were very eager.

Marian was watching her mother. "But — but

—" began Mrs. Frear. " I shouldn't know what to ask for it."

" I know what it's worth," said Mrs. Dove. " But of course, you'd have to take my word for it." The clock ticked loudly as the three women sat in silence.

" How much? " asked Mrs. Frear in a bewildered way.

" Thirty-five dollars, at a medium price," said Mrs. Dove.

" Oh, surely not so much as that! " ejaculated Mrs. Frear.

Mrs. Dove laughed. " You're not a very good saleswoman," she remarked. " But anyhow, it's worth it. I know the prices of these things. Do you want to let me have it at that price? " she asked briskly.

" I'd feel ashamed," Mrs. Frear responded.

" You needn't. It's purely a business matter."

Marian was thinking, " Thirty-five dollars! It takes so long to save that much, and what a lot it would buy, if one were careful! "

Her mother turned to her. " What do you say, dear? " she questioned. " Should you think me rather dreadful, if I sold your great-grandmother's milk-jug? " She was smiling in a puzzled way as she spoke.

" No, I don't think so," the girl answered slowly. " You have so many other old things like that, and you can use the money for something that you need." She was thinking, " Mother could have a nice coat, or a really good-looking dress."

Mrs. Dove was looking from one of the Frears to

the other. "I see no reason for being coy about it," said Mrs. Frear sensibly. "Yes, I'll sell it to you, Mrs. Dove. But do be sure that you're not giving me too much. I should feel really hurt if I thought you were — giving me too much — because —" She stopped uncertainly, but Marian was glad that her mother had said something to protect them from being patronized, if Mrs. Dove had any such intention.

"I see what you mean." Mrs. Dove's clear eyes met those of her hostess steadily. "I'll assure you honestly that you needn't have any fear of that."

"Then it's all right," said Mrs. Frear with relief. "You may have it."

"I'm glad." Mrs. Dove took a carved leather purse from her handbag, and counted out two ten-dollar bills and three fives, upon the table. "You beautiful thing!" She took the jug up and caressed it. "I couldn't resist you. And don't you see —" she turned to Mrs. Frear —"a lot of people will look at this and learn to love such things."

Everybody drew a long breath when the transaction was over. "Lola told me that you had a good many nice old things," Mrs. Dove continued, "but now I don't need to take her word for it. I can see for myself. That table is a beauty — and that old mirror; and the chairs are delightful, too. Do pardon me for staring about. I'm always fascinated with such things."

"Oh, I don't mind," Mrs. Frear reassured her. Marian was hoping that Mrs. Dove would not offer to buy anything more, just then. The money lay untouched upon the table. Mrs. Dove, with ready

tact, changed the subject, and began to talk about the garden, and then the girls, Lola and Agnes. "And oh, goodness!" she exclaimed, "I'll have to hurry back, if Barbara is to have the things I promised to bring for supper." She jumped up girlishly from her chair. She was holding the pitcher as if it were a baby. "You've made me very happy by letting me have this," she said.

"You've done us a good turn, too," Mrs. Frear replied in her gentle but frank way.

Marian sighed within herself. "Mother is so nice and simple about things," she thought. "She hasn't any false pride, and yet she isn't blunt or disagreeable. I wonder how she does it?" Aloud she said, "I'll go with Mrs. Dove and get the things, mother." She went out to get the eggs and lettuce and berries which the visitor required.

When she came back, Mrs. Frear was still sitting in the chair where she had been. She roused herself, and took the money from the table, putting it into her black leather purse. Neither she nor her daughter said a word. The older woman rearranged the shelf, putting another candlestick in the place of the jug. After a while she murmured thoughtfully, "It will help us a good deal." She smiled at the girl's serious face. "I keep thinking about your going to school at Willford. Perhaps we could manage it. We're doing so well with the garden."

"But I want you to have this for yourself," urged Marian. "You ought to, mother. You don't have anything."

"We'll share it," said Mrs. Frear, touching

Marian on the cheek. "Do you want to build up the fire in the kitchen? I thought I'd make some baking-powder biscuits."

As she lighted the fire, Marian felt unaccountably happy. Vistas seemed to open before her. Once or twice she thought, "I don't see why I'm not feeling patronized, or something. I think it must be because the Spaldings are such natural people. They don't stir one all up with make-believes." Indeed, a great part of her pleasure was the assurance that Mrs. Dove was happy in the acquisition of the jug, — the "museum piece," as she termed it.

"There are such unexpected ways of working out one's problems," said Mrs. Frear, as she sifted the flour into a gray crock. Cuddling Rosy-Nosey, who had just come in from out-doors, Marian speculated as to the various forms which she might expect the unexpected to take.

Trips back and forth between the two homes on the lake were now becoming very frequent. Mr. Spalding had gone, and the youngsters were busying themselves as usual with fishing, swimming, sewing, reading, picking wild berries, and going on expeditions about the lake. One day, soon after the episode of the luster pitcher, Marian was approaching Pigeon's Nest in her boat, thinking how terrified she had been that first morning, when she went over to take the raspberries. "I believe mother made me do that, just to help me to get acquainted with the Spaldings," she said to herself, "and to get me out of my silly bashfulness."

Busy with her thoughts, she climbed the hill, and

came upon the colored maid, Barbara, sitting on a rug, under a tree, crocheting at a piece of edging. There was a dejected air about the girl, in spite of the showy pink muslin gown which she wore.

Marian stopped to speak to the disconsolate creature. "That's a pretty pattern that you're crocheting, Barbara," she said.

"Landy, Miss, it ain't much," Barbara replied. "I've done heaps better'n that. My mother has aidges as deep as your finger, on her pillow cases, that I've made for her."

"You like to crochet, then?" asked Marian, for want of something better to say.

"Just so-so. I ain't crazy 'bout it," was the gloomy reply. "But there ain't nothin' to do in a place like this, where the leaves is a-whisperin' and the wind a-blowin' all the time. At night it's a whole lot worse — a mess o' little frogs goin' *ca-chug, ca-chug,* and beasts and things patterin' round in the leaves on the ground —"

"They aren't *beasts,* Barbara," Marian expostulated; "they're only rabbits and raccoons."

"I dunno what they are," sighed the colored girl; "and then there's them owls, always *whoo-hooin'* round — I don't like them owls, nohow."

"An owl couldn't hurt anybody —" Marian tried to say.

But Barbara was well started on her subject. "One night, just after we got here," she was going on, "I heard a noise, and I looked out the window. The moon was shinin' low down among the trees. And I seen one o' them big whitey-like owls a-flyin' as soft as a ghos' into the shadows. Do you think

it could 'a' been a kind of a ghos', Miss?" She suspended her crocheting, and looked up at Marian with wretched eyes.

"No, no! Of course not!" Marian exclaimed. "It was just an owl. I've seen lots of them. They're just as harmless as pussy-cats."

Barbara shook her head solemnly. "Pussy-cats ain't harmless, if they're black, and they cross your path at night," she answered with conviction. "And them owls that's all soft and whitey-like and creepy, and go flappin' and slinkin' along in amongst the trees, they ain't so harmless, neither. My mother would-a said that they was dead folkses souls, takin' another shape; I ain't sayin' it myself, but —"

"Horrors, Barbara!" cried Marian, "they're nothing but birds, out after something to eat."

"I don't like 'em," Barbara muttered; "nor the bats, either, that go whirlin' round your haid, just at dusk-time. No, ma'am, I don't care a-tall for this here livin' out in the woods. I'm just achin' every day to git back to where there's houses, and movies, and folks, and you can hear the ottomobiles honkin', and see the fire-engine go by."

"Oh, well, perhaps you'll get so that you like it here, after you've been here long enough," answered Marian.

"If I stayed *that long,* I'd be hobblin' on two canes, with no teeth ner hair," said Barbara bitterly.

Marian laughed, and went on up the hill. "I saw Barbara out on the bank," she said to Lola, after their greetings were over.

"Oh, yes, it's her afternoon out," said Lola, with a half-humorous sigh.

"Oh, she has an afternoon out?" queried the other girl vaguely.

"Of course. She has to have one, but she doesn't know what in the world to do with it. She fusses with her clothes, and dolls herself all up, as Harvey says, and writes letters to her people in Virginia, and crochets and sleeps, but all the time she's bored nearly to extinction."

"She says she doesn't like it here, at all," said Marian.

Mrs. Dove now spoke from the hammock. "She detests it," said the lady with a disturbed air. "Harvey!" She raised her voice as she called her nephew.

"What?" answered an uninterested voice from inside the house. Harvey came out with a book in his hand. He grinned and nodded at Marian, and then gave his attention to his aunt.

"Harvey, won't you take Barbara out in the boat?" begged Mrs. Dove. "She's so bored, she doesn't know what to do with herself, and I'm so anxious to keep her — I don't know what we'd do if she left."

"Why, I'd just as lief take her out," yawned Harvey. "But you know, Auntie, she doesn't care for it. She was squealing most of the time, when I invited her to take a ride, the other day."

"Well, you might try it again, anyhow." Mrs. Dove had a wrinkle between her eyes. "She makes me nervous, sitting around and sighing like a bellows when any one comes near her.

"All right. We'll quench those sighs," responded Harvey cheerfully. Then, looking over at the black

head of Barbara, just visible above the blue-berry bushes, he clasped his hands in a sentimental attitude, and sang under his breath,

"Why is that tear on your cheek?"

"Harvey!" cried Mrs. Dove, biting her lips, "can't you be serious?"

"Yes, Auntie, this is a serious matter," murmured the boy. "Don't you want to go along?" he asked, turning to Marian.

"I'm not much good at talking to her," said Marian dubiously. "I don't know what to say."

"One can but try," said Harvey in a resigned tone. "Want to come, Lo?"

"No," Lola returned. "Marian will go, and one is enough. More might make Barbara self-conscious."

"I don't know about that," said Harvey. "Come on, Marian." He walked over to where the maid was sitting, and Marian followed. "Don't you want to go out on the lake, Barbara?" the young man asked politely.

Barbara gave a start, and sighed loudly. "Thanks, Mr. Harvey," she responded, "I'm kind-a scared of the water."

"It's as smooth as a looking-glass," persuaded Harvey; "you'd better come. I'm sure you'll like it this time."

Barbara sighed again, and rose reluctantly. "I'm sure tired of doin' nothin'," she admitted. "I'll try takin' a little trip." She giggled and cringed as she stepped into the *Paloma*.

"See the minnows!" Marian called the maid's attention to the tiny dark fish scurrying about in the shallows.

"Cunning little mites, ain't they, Miss?" Barbara was attempting to do her part in the conversation. "But them clammy things, they're queer, I think."

"Clammy things?" Marian looked puzzled.

"That's what Miss Agnes says they are."

"Oh, clams!" laughed Marian.

"They ain't like the ones you eat with melted butter, are they?" asked Barbara anxiously.

Marian had never eaten any. They had now rowed out to the deep blue water, where mysterious depths showed themselves under the boat. "Ugh! Ain't it deep!" Barbara sat crouched in the stern, staring with round eyes at the space between her and the shore. "Some unseen hand might reach up and pull us down!"

"Come, now, Barbara," expostulated Harvey, "there aren't any unseen hands. Forget it."

"Some awful strange things does happen," the maid defended herself, drawing her pink skirts closely around her.

"Isn't it pretty to see the hills over there!" Marian was trying to change the conversation.

"Oh, it's gettin' blacker and blacker," groaned Barbara, with her eyes on the water again. "It goes down and down. Is there any bottom to this here, Mr. Harvey?"

"Acres of it — only seventy-five or eighty feet below," Harvey reassured her. And then he began to chant, *sotto voce:*

"Bryan O'Lynn and his wife and her mither,
They all went out in a boat togither.
The boat being thin,
They all fell in.
'You'll find ground at the bottom!' says Bryan O'Lynn."

Marian was restraining a smile. "You might have chosen something more cheerful," she said, looking pityingly at the frightened colored girl.

"That's cheerful enough," Harvey retorted. "What sort of song would you like, Madam?" An oar scraped the surface, and scattered the shining drops about on the water.

Barbara shrieked. "Oh, Landy! I thought we was goin' down, sure," she wailed.

"Why don't you look at the scenery? See how odd the house looks from here," said Marian.

"I ain't never cared much for scenery, Miss." The scared passenger was clinging to the sides of the boat. "I ain't never comin' out again. Take me back to shore, Mr. Harvey! Do, please take me back."

"All right. Back you go," assented Harvey, nothing loth. He threw a glance over his shoulder at Marian, and began singing in a sort of mumble,

"Oh, Mister Captain, stop your ship,
I want to get out and walk!"

In a few minutes, he had put the distracted Barbara ashore. She disappeared, gasping, around the side of the house, without a word of thanks or apology.

Mrs. Dove looked more anguished than ever, when the result of the pleasure-ride was explained to

her. "I don't know what on earth to do," she repeated. "We can't send for a colony of colored persons, to keep her company, and we can't cut down all the trees!"

"Some unseen hand tells me that we're going to lose our valued Barbara," commented Harvey wisely.

"Harvey! Don't say it!" Lola besought him.

"We might as well be resigned to our loss, Auntie," Harvey remarked.

"I might raise her wages," suggested Mrs. Dove.

"What's the use of wealth, if one can't spend it on the movies?" inquired Harvey tragically.

"It's a problem," Mrs. Dove sighed, not hearing what he said.

"I find it so," the lad made answer.

"Harvey, you are a tease." Mrs. Dove struggled to get out of the hammock, and then took Harvey's helping hand. "But anyhow, thank you for trying to do something for the cause. If she leaves, we can't restrain her by force, I suppose." Her hand fumbled at her hairpins. "Dear me, I must go and make myself presentable." She went into the house, and the others chatted for a while on the porch.

Presently they heard Mrs. Dove calling from her bedroom. "What is it?" questioned Harvey, going to the door of the sitting-room.

"Ask Marian to come here," said Mrs. Dove.

Marian went into Mrs. Dove's room, a bright chintz-hung place, with long horizontal windows, closely screened with netting. Mrs. Dove was hold-

ing up a gray linen skirt and looking at it inquiringly. "Do look at this skirt," she said to the wondering girl. "I had it made before I came up here, and it wasn't washed right, or something. Anyhow, it shrank beyond recognition."

"It's too bad," sympathized Marian, sorry to hear the sad tale. "Mother knows how to keep things from shrinking — at least she knows how to wash them, so that they won't shrink any more than they have to." It seemed queer, she thought, to see the silver-luster pitcher — her great-grandmother's — sitting on the shelf here in Mrs. Dove's room.

"This is too small for me around the waist and the hips," explained the lady, "and it's absolutely too good to throw away. Now, can you use it, do you suppose? It would be a real kindness if you'd take it. It worries me, hanging there, of no use to anybody."

"Why-y-y," Marian began, confusedly, "perhaps —"

"Slip it on over your other skirt, and see how it fits," suggested Mrs. Dove.

Marian put it on over her blue serge. "It will be perfect for you," exulted Mrs. Dove, "after the hooks are moved. You'll take it, won't you?"

The quick impulse to be humiliated came and passed. There was real honesty in the girl's tone as she said, "I'd love to have it. I need a thin skirt like this, ever so much."

The face of Mrs. Dove showed her satisfaction. "It seems sensible to make things serve as long as they will," she said. "I'm delighted that this can be

useful." Then there was a bit of easy talk over the wrapping of the skirt in a neat parcel. Marian took it under her arm. A shade of worry showed in Mrs. Dove's gray eyes. "I always dread Barbara's day out," she confessed. "It's a bother to get the supper. She stepped to the sitting-room door, and called to Agnes, who had been up stairs, reading, "Agnes, dear, can't you scratch up a bite for supper, a little later?"

"M-m-m," mumbled Agnes from above.

"I wish I could help," thought Marian; "but if I stayed, it would only be another to cook for. It's Agnes this and Agnes that," she meditated. "I don't believe they know how they keep at that poor youngster." Her feeling toward the youngest Spalding had been growing warmer as time went on.

When she went out to the porch again, Lola was embroidering, and Harvey was deep in a magazine. They both walked down to the dock with Marian, who laughed about her "plunder," as the others so often did about theirs. As she pushed her boat off, Harvey warned her, "Look out that the unseen hand doesn't get you." And he sang, richly rolling his *r*'s,

"You'll find gr-r-round at the bottom, says Br-r-ryan O'Lynn!"

CHAPTER X

THE DOVE-COTE RUFFLED

IN the meantime, no matter what the call might be, the garden could not be neglected. The rain fell, the sun shone, weeds sprang up, berries ripened, regardless of the lure of creek and lake.

Marian rose early and grubbed industriously in the soil, or plucked its fruitage with dexterous fingers. She loved the morning,— the coolness before the sun got high, the long rows of vegetables, neat and flourishing, the clusters of fruit with dew upon them, the beds and clumps of flowers blooming in natural or restricted lavishness. Wild birds, doves, and domestic fowls twittered, cooed, and cackled. The air was full of sounds and sweetness. Muscles were not yet wearied, nor was enjoyment jaded. And then there was the thrill of companionship to look forward to in the intervals of work, or when the day's tasks were finished.

The Spaldings were always dashing in at unexpected hours, for supplies, or for a chat, or the making of an appointment. It became the custom for the *Paloma* to appear at the landing after supper; Marian and her mother would take their boat and go out on the water, keeping near the *Paloma*. A running fire of conversation and banter passed between the two boats as the dusk fell, and the stars came out. Sometimes Harvey would start

a song, and they would all join in, lustily or softly, according to the cue which the leader gave them. Unfortunately, the whole group from Pigeon's Nest could scarcely ever come at once, for Barbara was afraid to stay alone, and afraid to go on the water; hence some one must of necessity stay with her at the cottage.

Things were going on harmoniously, with no portent of trouble, when an incident took place which disturbed the serenity of the friends for several days. One day, after the bathing hour, Marian and Lola were up stairs at Pigeon's Nest, chattering about nothing in particular, in the manner of girls. As they came out of Lola's room, they noted sandy tracks of bare wet feet on the upper landing, and saw that a soppy dark mass was lying beside Harvey's door, where it had been tossed from inside.

Lola groaned with irritation. "Just look!" she sputtered, "Harve's gone and left his bathing-suit on the floor again. What a mess! He does that just to be mean, I do think. Harvey!" Her voice rose sharply. An inarticulate grunt came from below stairs. "Harvey Spalding!"

"Well-ll, what is it?" The boy's voice had a suspicious tone.

"You've left your bathing-suit on the floor again," scolded Lola. "I should think you'd be ashamed."

"I don't know why. It's a good suit, isn't it?" The miscreant spoke with cool antagonism.

"You needn't be so rude," Lola shrilled, with an injured accent. Marian, beginning to get uneasy, touched her protestingly on the arm.

"Rude! I'd like to know who's rude," Harvey

retorted —" yelling at a fellow, so that you can be heard in the next county. I forgot the bathing-suit — I confess it, but that's no reason why you should go at me like that. And anyway, it's my suit. You don't have to bother with it."

"Yes, it's your suit," said Lola bitterly. "Nobody else would be so careless. And as for leaving it alone, I certainly shall. We women can't follow after you, picking up everything that you choose to leave lying around."

"Oh, Lola!" responded Harvey wearily, "we've talked about it enough. What's a bathing-suit?"

"A wet bathing-suit on the floor is bad enough," said Lola fretfully, "but if it were only that and once in a while, I wouldn't mind; but if it isn't one thing, it's another —"

"Don't bother, Lola," Marian interrupted in a low voice. "We'll hang it up, and let it go at that." She was distressed at the squabble which was going on.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," answered Lola aloud. "Harvey'll hang it up himself. The idea!"

"What's that?" came from below.

"Marian wanted to hang it up to dry, just to keep the peace," called Lola.

Harvey came to the foot of the stairs. "Well, she needn't," he shouted. "I won't hear of it. I'm going to attend to the suit myself, when I get ready. I'm sorry I forgot it." Penitence and stubbornness were mingled in his reply.

"When you get ready!" muttered Lola, exasperated.

"What did you say?" Harvey turned back to the stairs.

"I didn't say anything. I've said all I'm going to," Lola sulked.

"Thank heaven for that," Harvey blurted out. "You nag a chap almost to desperation."

"I suppose you'd like to find a garden of cucumbers!" Lola taunted him, not without a humorous readiness to cease hostilities.

"Watermelons would do." The break of laughter in Harvey's voice portended a return to his usual good nature.

It seemed as if the quarrel had ended with no harm done. But just then Mrs. Dove came in from the porch, where she had been trying to read and sleep. "What on earth is all this calling back and forth?" she inquired, blinking and bewildered. "I should think that if you wanted to quarrel, you'd at least stay on the same floor!"

"Now, I'll tell you, Aunt Elsie," Harvey began to explain, "the ladies started it. Lola's been going for me like a Scotch uncle, about nothing at all."

Lola came half way down the stairs. "Aunt Elsie," she said with indignation, "I think I have a right to defend myself when I'm put in the wrong. Harvey left his old sopping wet bathing-suit on the floor, just as he always does —"

Harvey gave a snort of wrath. "Lola, that's not playing fair," he cried. "Always does! I always *will,* after this, just to keep you from telling such a whopping —"

"Aunt Elsie, are you going to let him talk to me like that?" Lola's voice quivered.

"If you're going to cry, that settles it," groaned Harvey.

Mrs. Dove was horrified at the wrangle. "Now, now, children, do let's stop this right now," she begged, her face pale and worried. "Harvey, you mustn't get Lola all worked up,— and Lola, you ought to have more patience with your brother."

"Aunt Elsie," Lola began in a tone which implied a hundred years of patient martyrdom, "you know yourself that it's ve-ry seldom I say anything to Harvey about his careless habits. But there's a limit to all things. You're too easy with him, Auntie. He gets so that he thinks he can run the house."

Just then Agnes called out from the porch, "Oh, hush, Lola, and leave Harvey alone. What's the use of talking like that?"

"You always side with him, Ag," wailed Lola, ready to cry.

Harvey stood petrified with disgust. "I'll tell you what I'll do," he said in a dangerously calm voice. "I'll take my bathing-suit and myself over to the Cove, and that's the last you'll see of either of us — as far as bathing is concerned. I'll go in, by myself, and hang my suit on a tree over there, and then we sha'n't get on your sensitive nerves — for the rest of the summer."

"Oh, Harvey, won't you go in with us?" Agnes came to the sitting-room door, with a book in her hand.

"No, I certainly shall not inflict myself on people who find me so objectionable," returned Harvey with dignity.

"I don't find you objectionable," remonstrated Agnes. "And, Harvey —"

"What?"

"You were teaching us to swim dog-fashion."

"Marian can teach you. She's as good a swimmer as I am," said the boy calmly. "Where is that conf — that before-mentioned bathing-suit? I'll put it where it won't make any trouble again." He started up the stairs.

As he passed her, Lola put her hand on his arm. "Don't be silly, Harve," she besought him.

Harvey did not reply, but marched on up the stairs.

"Oh, goodness me! what a fuss about nothing," sighed Mrs. Dove, distracted with this family jar.

"Excuse me." Harvey walked past Marian, who had stood quaking, while the uproar was going on. She now looked as worried and guilty as if she had been responsible for the whole disturbance. With hardly a glance at her, he took the bathing-suit up, held it, dripping, between his thumb and finger, and walked down the stairs, with sand and water splotching every step. He strode across the living-room and out upon the porch, where the sun lay hot along the floor; flinging open the screen door, he clattered down the steps, and disappeared over the brow of the hill which led to the lake.

Lola stared blankly after him. Agnes, her book held against her bosom, watched him with reproachful eyes. Then she turned to her sister. "I hope you're satisfied," she exclaimed with sorrowful intensity.

"Of course! blame me for it all," moaned Lola.

"Girls!" said Mrs. Dove pleadingly.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Elsie," Lola apologized without sincerity. She came back up the stairs, and drew Marian into her room again. "It's too bad, Marian," she said with tears in her eyes, "to let you see us getting on like this. I told you we had a squabble once in a while." She sat down on the bed. Her face was red with vexation, and her hands trembled. "I'm sure I didn't mean to start such a hullabaloo. Do you think I was to blame, Marian?" She looked to her guest for consolation in this unpleasant predicament.

"I — I don't know. I can't say. It isn't right for me to take sides." Marian shrank from involving herself in the broil.

"I can see that you are taking sides with Harvey," flared Lola. "You think it's all right for him to leave his wet clothes around on the floor, for other people to pick up."

"No, no," cried Marian nervously, "of course he shouldn't have done it. But it wasn't such an awful thing, was it? Everybody —"

"Well, I suppose it wouldn't be, if that was the only thing he ever did," conceded Lola. "But I do think I might have a little sympathy. I feel badly enough about the whole thing." Tears came to her eyes again.

"I'm dreadfully sorry —" Marian began, hardly knowing what to say. "It seems too bad to have a fuss, when you're really so fond of each other," she continued. "But of course, I don't know much about such things, not having any brothers and sisters."

"You're lucky!" Lola burst out. And then she looked ashamed. "Oh, I don't mean that," she said, biting her lip. "Harvey's so stubborn when he gets his feelings hurt. I wish I hadn't said *anything,*" she murmured.

"Well, maybe he'll get over it. Don't worry," Marian advised, though she was scandalized, herself. "I must go home, now." She felt as if she had had quite enough of other people's complications.

"You'll be sure to come over and go bathing with us to-morrow, won't you?" urged Lola. "We'll really need you."

"Yes, if mother can spare me," Marian promised, with a heavy heart.

The next afternoon, at half-past three, she came over, rowing in her bathing-suit. Agnes was seated disconsolately on the dock, kicking her heels against a cleat. "Lola's crying because Harvey's gone to the Cove to swim," she said with a grin. "What a silly performance? Don't you think so?"

"Isn't she coming down?" asked Marian, without answering the question.

"Oh, yes, I guess so. I don't think she can resist," responded Agnes. "Besides, she asked you to go in with us. Here she comes!"

Lola came slowly down the hill, her eyes red. "Hello, Marian," she called.

"Hello! Are you ready to go in?" queried the guest, as the other girl approached.

"Yes. I thought at first that I wouldn't, but what's the use of cutting off your nose to spite your face?"

"Harvey won't go in?"

"No," Lola sighed. "He's hardly said a word since yesterday, and he's gone around with a haughty air, as if he were the Bishop of Rumptyfoo. I don't care. He needn't expect me to apologize to him. I haven't done anything — much."

"Never mind," said Marian. "We'll have a good time together. Come on in." She leaped in from the end of the dock, and Lola followed, Agnes coming after. Marian began teaching Agnes to tread water, and Lola cautiously swam out into blue water, and then swam hurriedly back. There was a kind of unspoken restlessness among them; they all kept glancing up the hill, as if they expected Harvey to appear.

After a while, Mrs. Dove came to the top of the hill. "Come on up, girls," she called. "You've been in long enough. Barbara's making iced tea for you."

Over the tea and cakes, there was chatter enough, but the worried sense of something lacking remained. Marian went home before Harvey came back. All the rest of the day she was busy helping her mother with pickling. Another day passed. Agnes and Lola rowed over in the *Paloma,* dawdled miserably about, and then rowed home again.

The next morning, early, Marian was out putting Paris green on the potatoes while they were damp with dew. It was necessary to put on the poison either in the morning or the evening, so that the powder would stick to the leaves. It was a glorious morning, cool and exhilarating. The low white mist had not yet disappeared from the meadow, nor the blue stillness from the lake.

While Marian was tramping down a row, shaking the lime and Paris green from a cheesecloth sack, she heard a faint melodious whistle. She was surprised, for it sounded like Harvey's, and she scarcely thought that he would be out at this early hour. Then through the quiet air came the plash and creak of oars. Presently, out of the path under the bird-cherry trees came Harvey, singing in an undertone a gay little song, the words of which Marian could not distinguish. At first the lad did not see her, but stopped and looked back through a rift in the branches, toward the smooth gleaming water. Then he came on again, singing. All at once he spied the girl in the garden. "Whoo-hoo!" he called jubilantly.

"Whoo-hoo!" Marian returned, going steadily on with her work. Harvey came toward her, brushing through the high wet grass. He leaned for a moment on the fence.

"Well, you are the early bird!" he cried in a tone of admiration.

"I'm not after worms, though," she answered with a return of shyness,—"it's potato-bugs!"

"Not so acceptable as the early worm, I'm sure," he replied, "especially with the flavor you're giving them." He vaulted over the fence. "Here, let me take that thing," he said, reaching for the bag.

"Oh, I can do it." Marian held the sack away from him, and continued to shake it over the spreading plants.

"Don't be obstinate, Miss," the boy commanded. "Give it to me."

"All right, if you must have it." Marian smiled

at him across the creamy potato blossoms; "but it seems to me that I'm not the only obstinate one."

"Who you 'ludin' at?" asked Harvey. Without waiting for an answer, he took the bag and walked to the end of the row, shaking the powder upon the leaves.

"How do you happen to be out so early?" asked Marian, as he came back to her end of the row.

"It was such a scrumptious morning that I couldn't stay in bed. I went out for a row in the *Paloma,* and when I got over this way, I thought I'd come ashore just on the chance that you'd be up. Perhaps you think I came to cop a few onions when there was nobody around — eh?" he added mischievously.

"Yes, that's what I suspected." Marian was entirely at her ease again.

"It's mean of you, spying about to see what I was going to take." Harvey turned, and went on with his task of disposing of the small yellow beetles which had attacked the potato plants. Marian watched him as he went up two or three rows, and back. There were not many rows in that particular patch. He walked briskly, tramping into the dark wet earth with his heavy shoes. His canvas puttees were soaked with the dew which the grass had left upon them.

"Done!" he called, as he neared the end of the last row. "That didn't take long."

Marian looked toward the house. Thin blue smoke was rising from the chimney. She knew that her mother was up and busy. "Have you had your breakfast?" she asked of Harvey.

"Nary a bite. Every one was sound asleep when I came out," the boy hurried to reply.

"Neither have I. I wanted to do this while the dew was on," said Marian. "Come on in and have breakfast with us."

"Don't ask me twice!" cried Harvey.

"I hope I don't have to," Marian answered.

"I'll say you don't. Where do we put this thing?" was the response.

"We'll hang it in the shed." They put away the sack and the Paris green, and approached the kitchen door.

Mrs. Frear looked up from the stove. "Just in time!" she said graciously. "I was about to call Marian." She brought clean towels from the drawer, and went back to her cooking, while the two young people washed the stain of toil from their hands.

"I certainly am hungry," confessed the girl.

"I'm a wild tiger," Harvey assured her, sniffing at the coffee and bacon.

Breakfast was set in the sitting-room, on the round table. Two red poppies in a glass vase gave a spot of color to the board. Marian had been careful to have flowers always in the house, since she had been at the Spaldings'.

The first course was dew-berries, big and black, with sugar and cream. Then came scrambled-eggs and bacon, with toast and coffee. The sunlight glinted in, over the white cloth. The faded carpet and cushions and wall-paper took on a fresher glow. Rosy-Nosey, as a special favor, was allowed to lap her milk beside Marian's chair, instead of in the

kitchen. There was a homely happiness about the whole scene.

After a while, the conversation touched on the events of the last few days. "Did you have a good swim yesterday?" asked Harvey, pouring cream into his second cup of coffee.

"M-m-yes, pretty good," Marian replied. "The girls missed you. Did you like it at the Cove?"

"Oh, yes, it wasn't bad. I frisked around for a while. But it's been beastly lonesome — two days of it, and more to come."

"I don't see why you —" Marian began. She had hardly known whether to mention the "rumpus," as Lola called it.

"I can't stay where I'm going to be nagged all the time," said Harvey sulkily.

"Who nags you?" Mrs. Frear looked over at him with clear and friendly eyes.

Her direct question rather took the boy aback. "Oh, the girls," he stammered, getting red. "Lola, to be exact. She and I had a — a sort of a falling-out."

"Can't you fall back in again?" Mrs. Frear smiled as she passed him the toast.

"Thank you." He took a piece absently. "It isn't easy," he returned. "When you get started with a quarrel, you — er — keep it up, you know."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. You hate to admit that you're in the wrong. And when you aren't, there's no use in being sentimental and taking the blame on yourself."

Marian sat breaking off bits of toast and saying nothing.

"Then you weren't to blame," said Mrs. Frear in a tone of relief. "That's good!"

Harvey looked over at her, flushing. He was silent for a moment, while he shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "We-ell," he said slowly, "of course, I might have been a little bit to blame, in a sort of a way. The truth is, I chucked my wet bathing-suit out on the landing, and forgot about it until Lola came upstairs and found it. It was a rather horrible thing to do."

"It wasn't very nice," agreed Mrs. Frear decisively.

Harvey started, and looked more confused. Perhaps he had expected to have his fault condoned.

"N-no, but I honestly didn't mean to leave it," he said; "and Lola got peeved and yow-yowed — I mean, she complained bitterly about it."

"Naturally she wasn't pleased," interpolated Mrs. Frear. "And one word led on to another."

"Yes." Harvey shot her a glance from his worried blue eyes.

"And you both said things you didn't mean at all."

"No, of course we didn't mean 'em," Harvey murmured. "I don't see why people say such things."

"I don't, either," said Mrs. Frear. "We hardly ever suffer from saying too little."

"I can't recollect that I ever did," Harvey grinned, looking over at Marian.

"Well, after we've said too much, the next thing is to repair the damage as completely as possible," suggested the hostess.

"I suppose so." Harvey looked troubled as he drank his coffee. "But you wouldn't expect me to go to Lola and make a lot of apologies, would you?"

"Why not?" answered Mrs. Frear quickly. "It seems to me that a man ought to be willing to be especially generous."

"Er — that's just what my mother would have said." Harvey sat with clouded face, his hands idle in his lap.

Mrs. Frear was wise enough not to say any more. There was a pause. "Won't you have some eggs or toast, or something?" she asked hospitably.

"No, thank you," the boy replied. He looked thoughtfully at Marian, who had sat silent during the conversation. "What's next on the program?" he asked. "Any more dear little pests to make an end of?"

"Not this morning." Marian roused herself at his words. "I was going to row over to the slope where the spring is, on the west side of the lake — Bunce's Bank, we call that place — and pick blueberries. Mother is going to make some pies out of the berries, and can some for next winter."

"I'll tell you what would be a good stunt," cried Harvey suddenly; "we'll row over and get Lola, and then we'll go to Bunce's Bank, and all pick."

"And take your lunch," added Mrs. Frear.

"That would be still more magnificent!"

"I'll put up something," promised the lady. "There's no hurry. It's early yet."

Harvey and Marian jumped up and began clearing off the table, while Mrs. Frear busied herself in the kitchen. A basket was packed with hard-boiled eggs, sandwiches, cake, and cheese.

"You must leave something for our share," Harvey remarked.

"You don't need to bother, this time," was the reply. "I'm sorry we can't make this more elaborate, as we might have done if we had planned it."

Marian washed the dishes, while Harvey helped Mrs. Frear with the things which Mr. Grant was to take to town. The sun had climbed higher, and the day promised to be warm.

It was after nine o'clock when Harvey and Marian started for the landing, with the lunch-basket and the pails for berries. "Your mother is a convincing sort of woman," said Harvey as he took up the oars of the *Paloma*.

"Yes, she is," assented Marian, "when it comes to advice about doing the square thing."

No more was said about the matter in hand, until they had reached Pigeon's Nest. Lola stood on the porch as they ascended the hill. She spoke cordially to Marian, but looked uncomfortable at the sight of Harvey. She unlatched the screen door for them, and they came in.

Harvey stood for a moment, gazing at her shyly. Then he slipped his arm around her waist, and kissed her lightly on the cheek. "Don't let's be mad any more, Lola-kid," he said. "I was a pig, and I'm as sorry as I can be that I kicked up such a row. It was all my fault for leav-

ing my stuff around under foot. I don't blame you in the least."

Lola's lips were quivering. "Oh, Harvey!" she exclaimed, clinging to his arm, "I'm so ashamed of myself, for being such a disagreeable minx! I know I ought to be more patient with you, and not say such sharp things. But somehow —"

"It's all right," her brother interrupted. "There's no use in keeping up a lot of foolishness. It's my place to be more thoughtful," he went on soberly. "I'm the head of the family, in a way, when father's not here — but I'm a mighty poor head, I'm afraid."

"You're a dear, Harve, most of the time." Lola tousled Harvey's hair with sisterly insolence. "We couldn't get along without you."

"Probably you won't have to. Ouch!" cried Harvey. "Listen, Lola, what do you say? We've got a lunch, that Mrs. Frear put up, and we're going over to Bunce's Bank, if you know where that is, to pick blueberries —"

"Oh, jolly!" Lola clapped her hands.

"And then, what do you say to this, Lo? Shall we all come back here, and go in bathing?"

"Let's!" Lola spoke as if going in bathing were a most original procedure — a special treat for that day. "And, Harvey, will you teach me to swim dog-fashion? Marian says it's a lot easier than the other way."

"I'm doggoned if I don't, and it's dogged as does it," laughed her brother. "Now, go and put on some other shoes. You can't scrabble around among the blueberries in those Cinderella things."

Lola turned to go up stairs, calling over her shoulder as she went, "Harve, you *are* a nice thing!" which was the extreme of fraternal praise among the Spaldings.

CHAPTER XI

HOPES AND PLANS

THE harmony which ensued after the quarrel was disturbed only by the tribulations of Barbara.

One afternoon, when Marian came into the house after some out-door tasks, her mother said happily, "I have a surprise for you."

"Oh, what is it, mother?" Marian questioned eagerly; and then her eyes lighted upon a basket covered with a white cloth and standing on the kitchen table.

"Here's a picnic supper for you and Lola and Agnes," Mrs. Frear explained. "You enjoyed the picnic at Bunce's Bank so much that I thought you and the girls would like to go out to-day by yourselves, and have a little good time."

"Oh, how splendid!" Marian fumbled at the white cloth on the basket.

"You mustn't look." Mrs. Frear restrained her. "Now this is the way it is: I spoke to Lola about it yesterday, and she's expecting you. I told her that you would come over with your boat and get her and Agnes, so that Harvey could use the *Paloma* if he wanted to."

"Aren't you a sly mother, making all those arrangements behind my back!" Marian squeezed her mother's arm. "But how about you? Don't

you want to join our picnic? It seems mean to leave you out."

"I was going to tell you, if you'd give me a chance," Mrs. Frear went on. "Mr. Grant said yesterday that he was going to drive in to-day and get me and take me over to see Mrs. Grant, and they wanted me to stay to supper. He'll bring me back about dusk. I'm expecting him almost any minute now. They asked you, too, but I was already planning the picnic; so I told him you had another engagement."

"That sounds quite elegant — for me, when I never have any," laughed the girl. "But it *is* nicer. Mrs. Grant would probably rather talk with you, and not have me hanging around; and honestly, mother, it may be horrid of me, but I don't like to listen to all her aches and pains. I don't see why people talk about such things so much."

"I don't suppose they realize how much they do it," sighed Mrs. Frear. "I think it would be better for Mrs. Grant if she didn't keep dwelling on her afflictions; and that's one reason why I'm willing to go. I always try to get her to think and talk about something else."

"It's awfully good of you, and they do appreciate your going over," Marian replied. "But I'm just delighted to go on a picnic with the Spalding girls. I suppose I ought to get cleaned up, and start over there about five."

"A little before, if you can," Mrs. Frear returned. "And I do hope you'll like the lunch."

"As if we wouldn't!" Marian looked reproachful. "Here comes Mr. Grant, now."

When her mother had gone, Marian made herself ready in white blouse and blue serge skirt, and walked down to the landing with her basket, conscientiously refraining from peeping in to see what food had been provided. The row across the lake seemed short, as it did nowadays, because she had so many things to think about. She found Lola and Agnes waiting for her on the porch, where Mrs. Dove was doing a bit of leisurely needlework.

"Oh, I want a drink of water before we start," said Lola. She and Marian went out through the dining-room to the kitchen. At once their ears were assailed by the sound of sobbing outside the door.

Stepping to the screen, they saw Barbara sitting hunched up on the back steps, her hands over her face. Her shoulders were heaving rather ostentatiously, as if she were not sorry to have the girls as witnesses to her misery.

"What in the world —" began Marian.

"Whatever is the matter, Barbara?" queried Lola. The colored girl sobbed on, rubbing her eyes with her handkerchief. "What is it?" Lola continued. "Do tell us. Has any one been unkind to you?"

"No, no, Miss Lola," the girl made reluctant reply, "everybody's been jus' as good as they could be. They's been too good."

"Too good? Why, what do you mean?" asked Lola, mystified.

Barbara wiped her eyes and swallowed hard. "I'm ashamed to tell your Auntie,— she's been so nice to me — but I can't stand it here, nohow — I can't stand it." The maid's voice rose in self-pity.

"Why not?" Lola spoke sympathetically, though she already knew the answer.

"I'm so lonesome — them frogs — them whitey owls — the dark woods,— that there thunder and lightning,— I ain't used to no such things. I want folks!" Barbara's voice became a cry.

"But there are folks here," argued Lola weakly. She felt Barbara's case to be overwhelmingly just.

"*Not my kind o' folks!*" The cry became a wail.

The girls fell silent. Marian's heart jumped in sympathy with the colored maid. She herself knew what it was to be hungry for one's own kind. She and Lola looked at each other behind Barbara's back. "Well, well," said Lola at last, "I suppose you are lonesome. I don't see why you have to stay if you don't want to."

"But there's Miss Elsie," Barbara said with hesitation. "She don't like housework. It don't seem right —" There was, however, a suppressed joy in her tone.

"We'll get along somehow," Lola assured her. "I'll go and talk with Mrs. Dove. You want to go and visit your sister in Chicago, I dare say, until we get ready to go home?"

Barbara had stopped crying, and was pulling the corner of her damp handkerchief. "Yas'm, that's what I was thinkin'," she answered in haste. "If your Auntie —" She gulped and began using her handkerchief again.

"I'll see Auntie."

The two girls went back through the house, to the porch. Mrs. Dove had a little pile of pale pink silk

and narrow filet lace in her lap, and was taking careful stitches in some article of feminine apparel. She looked up inquiringly as the girls stood before her.

"Aunt Elsie," Lola began, "Barbara's been crying like mad, out on the back steps."

Mrs. Dove put her gold thimble on the table, and began to gather up the pink silk. "Is anything wrong?" she asked. And then she gave a groan. "I know what it is, of course. She wants to get away from here."

"Yes, she does," Lola admitted. "She says she wants her own kind of folks!"

Mrs. Dove smiled wryly. "We all do," she remarked. "I suppose she'll have to go." Her chin quivered. "What under the sun we'll do without her, I don't know."

"It's too bad, Auntie, dear," said Lola. "I know you don't like housework, but Agnes and I'll do all we can —"

"Speak for yourself, Lo," put in Agnes, who had been alertly listening to what was said. Her brown eyes twinkled as she spoke, for she was well aware that her share in the household labors would not be small.

"And Harvey will help, I know he will," the older girl went on, without paying any attention to Agnes. "We can't keep Barbara here, like a chained galley slave."

"Mercy! What a way of putting it," Mrs. Dove exclaimed. "No, I should say we couldn't. I'll go and talk to her." She rose resignedly, and made her way to the kitchen. She came back drooping. "She's to go to-morrow, if we can get that Erickson

boy to take her to the station. It does seem hard." The lady took up the pink silk. "We'll have to make the best of it."

"Anyhow, I'm glad I've had domestic science," commented Lola, and Aggie-Dear will be a perfect little whirlwind in the kitchen," she added teasingly.

"Aggie-Dear will run away from home, or jump into the lake, or something, if you go on insulting her," retorted Agnes angrily. There were times when the worm turned and writhed under oppression.

"Don't say such things, Agnes, I beg you," admonished Mrs. Dove, frowning over her sewing. "Be a lady if you can."

"My sister'll have to set me a better example," muttered Agnes.

"Don't you think we'd better go on?" suggested Marian. "It's getting rather late."

"I put up a thermos bottle of lemonade, and nearly forgot it," Lola cried, as they were starting. "Agnes, run back and get it, that's an angel."

"If I were an angel, I'd fly," Agnes grumbled. "I wish I had wings. I need 'em." She went slowly back to the kitchen, and got the thermos bottle, and then followed the other girls down the hill. Marian opened her lips to say something about the unfair demands which were so thoughtlessly put upon the younger sister; but closed them again, for she hardly dared to say what she had in mind.

Marian and Agnes rowed across the lake to the west side, north of the tamarack swamp, where among scattered trees there were the scanty remains of an old house, long ruined and abandoned. It was a quiet, secure place, with sloping banks in front, and

weed-grown fields and gnarled apple-trees behind. The girls clambered up the hill, and deposited their basket and bottle on the grass.

"I think there's a paper under the cloth," said Agnes; "a note or something. I see a corner sticking out."

Marian investigated, and found a note from her mother. "I've put in a jar of creamed potatoes," the note ran, "and a basin. I thought it would be fun to make a fire and have one warm dish for your supper. The matches are in a box, tied to the handle of the basket. Be sure to set the basin solidly on some stones or bricks, so that it won't tip over. And be careful about the fire! Love to you all. I hope you will have a good time. K. L. F."

"How lovely of her," said Lola. "Now, that's a mother worth having. Let's see. This is the jar of potatoes." She lifted out a glass jar with a tight cover.

Marian was reaching into the basket for the matches, and Agnes was already rushing to the ruins of the house, for bricks with which to build a fire-place. For the next half hour, the girls were absorbed in the task of fitting together bricks and stones for a rude stove, gathering dry twigs, lighting the fire, and heating up the rich creamy mass which they poured out of the jar.

"This is a lot more fun than just eating the cold lunch out of the basket," meditated Agnes, poking the fire with unnecessary vigor, "and I thought that would be fun enough. It's so still here, and so green and beautiful."

"I always loved picnics," said Lola, "and we don't have half enough of them. I'm so glad we could have this — just we girls, by ourselves. And Harvey's off bass-fishing, so his feelings aren't hurt."

"It is good to be here, isn't it?" murmured Marian. The other girls could not know how much it meant to her to be out having a good time like this, with lively and interesting companions. "It's so different since you came!"

"We're glad we found you," commented Agnes, in her blunt way.

Marian could not answer. She bustled about, spreading a white cloth on the grass, and taking out the dainties which loving hands had prepared. There were paper plates, clean and light, to eat the creamed potatoes and the salad from, and three Canton cups for the lemonade.

"Your mother shouldn't have given us these dear old cups," protested Lola.

"I think she thought we'd enjoy our picnic better, and be more careful of everything, if she trusted us with something nice," responded Marian wisely. "I know mother."

The feast was now ready, and the picnickers sat about comfortably on the grass, eating and drinking at their leisure. At first they did not feel much like talking, for they were hungry, and the stillness of the remote place subdued them. But when the meal was partly over, their tongues were loosened, and they settled down for a good old-fashioned girlish chat.

"Your mother's such a good cook, and such a perfect housekeeper!" said Lola. "Aunt Elsie can't

bear housekeeping. She does it well enough — but there's a difference. After mother went," she added reminiscently, " we had a number of women to run the house and look after us."

" We had a horrid woman," Agnes interrupted her.

" Oh, Agnes! " Lola reproached her sister.

" Well, she wasn't good to us, Lo, you know that," Agnes went on. " She wasn't a ' real lady.' Her manners were awful, and she was as mean to us —"

" Father was nearly frantic," Lola agreed. " Every time he came home, we had some harrowing tale to tell him." She accepted a frosted nut-cake which Marian held out to her.

" My! what scrumptious cake! " interpolated Agnes, setting her teeth into the soft firm icing of her share.

" Aunt Elsie's had enough of it," Lola continued; " I'm sure she feels that way, though she doesn't say anything. But I suppose it will all work out," she remarked, as if she feared burdening Marian with these family details.

" Just think! It's getting on toward the time when we'll have to go ' back to the mines,' as Harvey says; he means school," Agnes explained to Marian, " and you'd think he hated it, but he's crazy over it, and can hardly wait to get back. I'm not so keen, myself."

" Do you remember your asking me why I didn't go to school? " Marian looked over at Agnes, who was holding her last bite of cake in her sticky fingers.

The young girl flushed darkly. " I — I'm sorry

if I was rude," she stammered. "I didn't understand. I thought everybody went to school."

"You've been spoiled," Lola frowned at her sister. "What were you saying, Marian?"

"I've been thinking that perhaps mother and I could arrange things so that I could go to the high school at Willford, this fall," said Marian. "Oh, do have one of these pickles! We've been talking about it, and we're not sure, but we think we can manage it." She did not feel so shy of telling how hard it was to "manage" as she once would have felt.

"Oh, I hope you can." Lola beamed at her friend. "But what will your mother do?" she asked quickly.

"She'll go, too," answered Marian —"not to the high school, of course." She and Agnes giggled. "But we could get a room or two, and do 'light housekeeping,'— isn't that what they call it?"

Lola's eyes shone. "Oh, that would be fine," she cried. "It would give your mother a change, and she could make friends. She likes people so much."

"We haven't argued it all out yet," Marian said, absently pouring more lemonade into Agnes's cup. "But"— her voice faltered —"I feel so ignorant and so frightened. I don't know how I'd get along in a whole big school full of strangers."

"You're just as good as any one, in any old high school," Agnes blurted out, pausing with her cup in her hand. "You needn't take a back seat for any of them."

Marian smiled at her champion. "That's nice

of you, Agnes," she answered; "but I really am scared. It seems as if I don't know much of anything. Of course, I have my certificate from the country school, so that I could enter the high school at Willford. But I wondered if I could possibly finish the course in less than four years. I don't know enough about those things to even make any plans."

"You're way beyond the ordinary freshman!" cried Lola excitedly. "You could more than just enter, I feel sure."

"Why, I'm a sophomore, myself," said Agnes, "and you know heaps more than I do."

Marian twisted her paper napkin nervously. "Maybe — about swimming and birds and cabbages," she remarked: "but those things don't happen to be in the course of study."

"Then they ought to be," asserted Agnes.

"But there is a course in agriculture, isn't there?" asked Lola, eager to encourage. "You could pass that without turning your hand over."

"That ought to come easily," Marian admitted; "but there are other things — algebra, and history, and literature, and composition."

"You've had algebra, haven't you?" Lola inquired.

"Yes, I had a little in the country school, and I worked through the whole book by myself, in the evenings. It was hard, but I liked it. It was sort of thrilling to see whether I could get the answer the first time, or not."

"I'll bet that you could pass an examination in it, and get credit," hazarded Lola.

"I'd have to brush up a lot," said Marian, as if weighing her knowledge of algebra in the balance.

"Let Harvey help you," Lola suggested; "he's a shark at mathematics, and he'd like to teach some one. Boys always like to show that they know more than some one else — especially a girl," she added, with the terrible discernment of sisters.

"I couldn't have him using his vacation in that way." Marian shrank from accepting too many favors from the Spaldings, and particularly from Harvey.

"It wouldn't hurt him any," sniffed Agnes.

Marian had a sinking feeling when she remembered how far these young people had gone beyond her. The prospect of going to school was dimmed by the fear of humiliation and ridicule.

But Lola was eagerly continuing to explain to Marian how slight the difficulties really were — at least in Lola's eyes. "There are the literature and composition. You've read the *Lady of the Lake,* and that sort of thing, and I know that you can write —"

"Why, you don't at all," gasped Marian. "You've hardly seen anything that I've written."

"I know you can, anyhow," Lola retorted, "from the way you talk and appreciate things, and the love you have for reading."

"It's too bad you aren't the examiner," Marian responded; "if you were, I'd pass on a hundred."

"I'll tell you what you do," broke in Agnes, with the air of an oracle; "you write out something, or dig up something that you've already written, and show it to Aunt Elsie. She's awfully keen on good

writing — I mean the words, not the hen-tracks. If she says you're all right, you are, believe *me!*"

"Agnes, you're horribly slangy, but you do have a gleam of sense once in a while," said Lola in a scolding tone tempered by approval. "That's just the thing for Marian to do. Aunt Elsie never minces matters. She says what she thinks, if she sees any use in saying it."

"I couldn't stand it to hear what she thinks about my writing." Marian grew red, and moved the dishes nervously.

"Nonsense! Whatever she says wouldn't hurt you. You will do it, won't you?" Lola wheedled her new friend. "I think they'll let you enter the second year in the high school, and trust you to make up what you haven't credit for."

"We'll see, we'll see," answered the country girl, fearing that she had made too much of her affairs. "Won't somebody have something more?" She returned belatedly to her duties as a hostess.

"I couldn't eat another thing. But it's been delicious," Lola sighed.

"It's too bad there's such a lot left." Agnes surveyed the table and the basket with an expression of regret.

While they sat there, enjoying the fresh breeze, and the stillness of the late afternoon, the sound of a squirrel chattering indignantly roused them from their silence. "What is that noise?" asked Lola, looking apprehensively toward the forest.

"It's a squirrel. He acts as if he heard something he didn't like," Marian replied.

"Hush! I hear something, too," exclaimed Agnes. Faint sounds, as if made by some person or animal pushing through the underbrush, came to their ears.

Lola looked alarmed. "What do you suppose it is, Marian?" she asked, in an agitated voice.

"A cow, maybe," Marian made response, her aspect undisturbed; "or maybe a man."

"Oh, dear! I hope it isn't either." Lola began to look around for a refuge.

"Marian wouldn't let either of 'em hurt us," said Agnes, hitching over a little nearer to her protector.

They sat waiting, their faces intent with this momentary mystery. Then the figure of a man emerged from the woods and began to walk across the weedy field behind the ruined house. His form was vaguely visible among the low branches of the apple-trees.

"What can he want?" whispered Lola, clutching at the grass with nervous fingers.

Marian drew a long breath of mingled relief and vexation. "It's Carl Erickson," she said aloud. "I don't see what he's doing here."

"Oh! that Erickson boy!" Lola remarked comprehendingly. "He's perfectly harmless."

The young man came on, toward the little group sitting on the grass. He walked heavily, as if weary with his day's work, and carried his hat languidly in his hand, for coolness. He paused at the house, and then came forward, pushing aside the branches as he approached the three girls on the edge of the bank.

"Huh!" He stood regarding them, his sullen

face and light unkempt hair framed among the green boughs. A slow gleam of recognition came into his eyes.

"Oh, it's you, Carl," said Marian, looking up at him. There was not enough friendliness in her tone.

"Yes, it's me," he answered gruffly.

"How do you do?" said Lola, in her easy manner. "You remember the Spaldings. You hauled our things from Willford."

"Yes. I remember." The awkward overgrown fellow stood breathing heavily, hardly knowing what to say. "I was walking back from Hans Marcusson's," he explained; "been working there to-day. I saw the smoke, and didn't know what was going on — I thought I'd come and see." His eyes wandered to Marian again.

"We just built up a little fire for our supper. Look." She pointed to the rude stove. "We weren't going to let the fire run." She knew the dread which the country-folk felt for running fires in woods and fields.

"Oh." The young man stood with his form sagging wearily to one side. The three girls sat looking at him with antagonism in their eyes.

Then Marian, scanning him more keenly, felt her antipathy melting away. He looked tired, after the long hot day in the harvest field. He had a loutish repellent exterior, but under it the girl detected a hint of wistfulness. He stared moodily at the white cloth, with its few blue dishes, at the food remaining, and at the red coals of the fire. Slowly it dawned upon Marian as she sat gazing at him that even Carl Erickson might be hungry in the way that

she had been — hungry for something besides hard work and narrow living.

"Have you had your supper, Carl?" she asked suddenly, with a new kindness in her voice.

"Me?" He looked at her with almost a tinge of suspicion. "No, I haven't. The Marcussons had to go away — somebody sick, or something — and I said I'd go home for supper. I s'pose I'd better go." He moved reluctantly backward, turning to leave the scene.

"Wait. There's plenty here — mother put up such a lot," cried Marian. "Won't you stay and have it?" She found herself speaking with real cordiality.

The boy's face grew less clouded. "Why-y, you don't want *me* at your picnic, do you?" he stammered. He looked down at his heavy shoes, soiled with earth, and at his blue overalls, with the signs of toil upon them.

Lola had caught something of Marian's idea. "Of course we do," she put in with a friendly smile. "It's nice to have some one drop in, like neighbors, you know." She made a gesture of welcome. "Do stay," she urged.

Erickson hesitated and was won over. "I'd like to," he confessed. "I'm hungry — and I'm late for supper at home — and you have an awful nice picnic." Even so, Marian knew that his look of pleasure was more for the companionship than the food.

"That's fine!" she said heartily. "I'm glad you'll stay."

"We all are," added Agnes simply.

"Well, I'll fix up your fire, then." Eager to have something to do, Carl stooped to replenish the blaze. There was still a good supply of the creamed potatoes in the basin, but it had been set aside, and had grown cold. "Look," said the youth, "if you'd put the bricks together like this, the fire would draw better." With a swift movement, he rearranged the bricks, so that there was a draught between them and up a tiny chimney.

"How easy that is, and what a difference it makes!" Lola exclaimed.

The boy gave her a grateful glance. "I've been out in the woods a good deal," he said, glad of some conversation to offer. "And now," he went on, as he rose to his feet, "I guess I'd better wash up a little."

"Here's a towel. Mother put two in." Marian fumbled in the big basket and produced a folded bit of linen, which she tossed to Carl.

Catching it, with a mumbled "Thank you," he clumped down the slope to the edge of the water, where he stood washing his hands and face, and drying them, while the girls cleared away their used dishes, flicked off the crumbs from the cloth, and straightened it for the newcomer. Agnes carefully tended the contents of the basin, on the stove. The problem of a plate was solved by turning one upside down, and covering it thickly with oiled paper from the sandwiches. As Carl came up, Marian ran down the hill, to wash a cup and a knife and fork. Soon the feast was ready, and the unexpected guest sat down upon the grass.

"It seems kind-of funny for me to sit here and

eat alone," he apologized, his clean tanned face reddening with embarrassment.

"We'd keep you company, but we couldn't eat another bit," Agnes explained to him.

Hunger routed his scruples, and the young man ate heartily of the food before him; and while he ate, the girls engaged him in conversation. Agnes was a master-hand at asking questions, but with more tact than she usually possessed, she led Carl on to talk of his work, and of the crops, and the prices of farm produce. Marian asked after his mother and sisters. As he talked, he became less "grouchy," as Agnes would have said, and responded more willingly to the warmth of thought which was behind the desultory speech.

"This is awful good of you girls," Carl said at last, as he was disposing of cake and cheese. "Why, I didn't s'pose — I kind-of thought —" He interrupted himself with a huge bite of cake.

"It's awful, walking along hungry," spoke up Agnes. "I'm glad you didn't have to go any farther."

"I kind-of thought —" the young man repeated vaguely.

"That *we* thought we were pretty nice — nicer than other people," laughed Lola, speaking in jest, and yet completing what he wanted to say.

"Er — well, I don't know as I —" Carl protested, with a sidelong glance at the girl.

"Never mind. You were wrong, whatever it was," said Lola.

The boy sat staring grimly into the red coals under the bricks. "It's kind-of hard," he muttered,

"seein' other folks doin' nothin' but have good times, when you have to work, and don't have much of anything else."

The girls understood that he was explaining his past behavior, and in a way begging pardon. It was as near as he could come to an apology or an expression of regret. Marian, to her own amazement, knew exactly how he felt, and what he was trying to say.

"I think we know what you mean," said Lola quietly.

"We get you, Steve," added Agnes with solemnity. They all laughed at the flippant words and the earnest tone; and a sense of ease was restored to the group.

Just then, they caught the sound of singing on the lake, not far from shore. Snatches of the words came to them up the hill:

> "Oh, the days of the Kerry dances,
> Oh, the ring of the piper's tune!"

"It's Harvey," said Lola and Agnes at once. Agnes gave a long musical trill which was a signal in the family. The music stopped, and the trill came back.

In a few minutes, Harvey came striding up the hill. "I thought I'd come over and see if you were all right," he called. He looked surprised when he saw young Erickson, who had risen and was standing awkwardly beside the cloth spread on the grass. "Hello, Erickson," cried Harvey. "Glad to see you. Where did you arrive from?"

There was a chorus of explanations. Carl was

less awkward with Harvey than with the girls. They all sat down again for a few minutes' chat. A faint shadow of dusk began to fall over the landscape. The throbbing song of a whip-poor-will sounded near at hand. The frogs down in the tamarack swamp set up an intermittent concert. "Time to go — eh?" suggested Harvey.

"Mother'll be coming home about now," said Marian. "I suppose I ought to begin to think about getting home, too."

Carl Erickson got up, reaching for his hat. "I must peg along," he remarked in a casual tone.

"Oh, don't get excited," drawled Harvey. "I'll take you across the lake, and that'll save you quite a walk. And by the way, my aunt wanted me to go and hunt you up to-morrow morning. Can you take our maid Barbara — the colored girl, you know — to the train to-morrow or Monday? She's made up her mind that she's got to go."

"Why, I guess I could do it to-morrow," Carl returned. "I don't know anything to prevent."

"Fine!" Harvey laid his hand on the other boy's shoulder. "And say! To-morrow's Saturday, you know. Can't you stop for supper on your way back, and go fishing with me? They say the bass bite in great shape, along about sundown."

Erickson grew red with pleasure. "Gee whizz! I'd like to," he replied, with real eagerness in his dull gray-blue eyes. "I've caught a lot of 'em about that time o' day, and it cert'nly is nice on the lake then — so cool, and all. Maybe I can work it. Guess I could leave my team tied out for a while, if I brought along something for 'em to eat."

"We'll fix it up," responded Harvey. The girls had begun to pick up the dishes and repack the basket. The boys brought water and sand, to put out the last coals of the fire.

"It's been a grand picnic," said Agnes, slipping her arm into Marian's.

"The best I ever had," supplemented young Erickson shyly. "Somehow, you know, I feel a lot better about — quite a number of things."

CHAPTER XII

THE EMANCIPATION OF AGNES

"YOU must stay to supper," said Mrs. Dove to Marian. "The girls are going to get it — or some of us," she added uncertainly. "The girls enjoyed your picnic so much. Agnes, dear"— she raised her voice —"you'll try to help with the supper, won't you?"

"Let me help," said Marian with enthusiasm. "I've done quite a good deal of cooking."

Agnes came to the sitting-room door. "It would be wonderful if you would," she said. "In Domestic Science they taught us how to make white-sauce, and cocoa-nut icing, and pineapple salad, but I don't see how I could make any of those for supper."

"We'll think of something," Marian assured her. "You know I brought some lettuce and berries." She and Agnes went out into the kitchen and stood staring vaguely at the shelves and cupboards.

Agnes frowned. "Harvey likes something 'hearty,' as he says. We've got to think of something besides lettuce."

Marian had opened a cupboard door. "Oh, here's some dried beef in a glass can," she exclaimed. "You can make some of your white-sauce, with dried beef in it, and we'll have that with nice new potatoes."

"Oh, that will be great. I can make white-sauce, if I do say it," glowed Agnes, taking down the can.

"If you'll get the fire to going, I'll scrape the potatoes, and have them ready," Marian went on; "and while they're boiling, you can make the creamed beef, and I'll furbish up a salad. We could have some hard-boiled eggs and some of these little radishes with the lettuce — that will make it more substantial."

"There's bread left," Agnes reported, looking into the tin box. "Barbara made quite a lot before she left; and there's cake, to go with the berries —"

"It will be a banquet," predicted Marian, glad to be of service.

The fire was soon snapping in the stove, and the small round potatoes were rapidly bereft of their skins. The two girls worked busily, with a good deal of talk, and perhaps more clatter than was necessary.

Agnes heard Harvey going through the sitting-room, and called out to him, "Harve, don't you want to set the table?"

Harvey came to the kitchen door, and stood with his hands in his pockets, surveying the scene and the cooks. "Me? Set the table?" he asked with lofty air. "Since when have I been your second-girl?"

"I haven't noticed that you've ever been," returned Agnes, red of face.

Harvey came lurching out into the kitchen with a mischievous intent showing in his eyes. When he got behind Agnes, he gave her braided hair a tweak, saying in a tone of concern, "Aggie, your hair's hanging down!"

"Harve! Leave me alone!" Agnes shrank away from him, and turned an angry face over her shoulder.

Harvey chuckled. "Never mind, Ag," he said, and began to sing:

> "There's a little spark of love still bur-rning,
> Down deep in my heart for you-oo-oo!"

"Well, there isn't any in mine," Agnes sent back at him crossly. "I think it's mean of you not to set the table. Marian and I are as busy as we can be."

"I suppose I'll have to"; Harvey spoke with resignation. "Where's the tablecloth?"

"You know where it is." Agnes was measuring flour in a tablespoon.

"No, I don't. Do you think I'm a clairvoyant?" Harvey put on an injured air.

"You don't have to be, to find the tablecloth," Agnes returned.

"I see I shall have to go into a trance." Harvey began to roll his eyes, and to breathe violently, clutching the air and swaying. "Is this a tablecloth I see before me?" he gasped. "Ah! now 'tis gone, and now I see it still! M-my soul perceives it. Methinks I spy it in the cupboard drawer." He jerked open the drawer. "Ha! there it is! That was a first-rate trance," he remarked in a matter-of-fact way, to his sister. "Try one, Ag, the next time you lose your hair-ribbon."

Agnes disdained to respond to this suggestion; instead, she said in a cold voice, "Did you wash your hands, Harve?"

"What, wash my fair hands?" queried the boy

in mock amazement. "No, dear lady. Two years ago, I used Pear's soap — since then I have used no other."

"You look it." Agnes gave a glance at Harvey's hands, which were lean and brown, but strictly clean. Nevertheless, he went to wash them in the basin in the corner.

Marian had been listening, much amused, while she made preparation to "furbish up" the salad. Now she turned to her companion-cook, saying, "Do any of you like a little bit of onion in the salad, Agnes?"

"Yes, all of us, I guess," answered Agnes, deep in the mysteries of white-sauce.

Harvey had taken down some plates, and was about to carry them to the dining-room. He paused on the threshold. "Dear me!" he ejaculated in a high-pitched voice, "does my delicate olfactory nerve detect the vulgar odor of onions?" Nobody answering, he burst into song:

"There is a boarding house,
Not far away,
Where they have —"

Mrs. Dove spoke querulously from the front porch, where her hammock hung beside the dining-room window, "I wish you wouldn't sing that song, Harvey."

"Why, that's a fine song, Auntie," replied the boy innocently. "What's the matter with that? 'Tis the sordid reference to onions which disturbs your soul. Madam, I will begin over, and change the words." He went on, with a lusty shout:

"There is a boarding-house,
Not far away,
Where they have pink ice-cream
Three times a day.
Oh, how the boarders smile,
When they hear that pink's in style,
Oh, how the tra-la-la,
Three times a day!

"I couldn't think of anything more to rhyme with *smile* and *style,*" he apologized, "but I think it's a nice song, anyhow." He put the plates noisily upon the table, where he had spread the cloth.

Agnes sighed disgustedly. "When he gets to going on like that, there's no use in trying to shut him off," she muttered.

"I think it's fun," said Marian, suppressing a giggle. "He isn't doing any harm."

"If you had him shouting around all day, you'd get tired of him," asserted the younger sister. "Do you think that this is thick enough — or ought I to put in a little bit more flour?"

"There's no one to shout around our house," commented Marian, disregarding the problem presented to her.

Agnes stared, stirring her sauce. "It must be awful not to have a brother," she meditated, with an awed look.

"Well, I get on without one." Marian did not like being pitied. "I believe I would make that a trifle thicker," she advised. "And do you think I'd better put a spoonful of cream in the mayonnaise? Do your people like it so?"

"M-huh"; Agnes was getting out more flour.

Harvey came back to the kitchen, and his teasing and hilarity began again.

With this accompaniment, and what Harvey called "coop-eration," the meal was prepared and set forth in the dining-room. Lola and Mrs. Dove praised the cooks, ceasing to lament the departure of Barbara.

"Ha, ha! Lola and Harve have got to wash the dishes," exulted Agnes, eating her creamed-beef and potatoes with relish. "Marian and I did the cooking."

"I set the table," Harvey complained. "I don't know why I should have to do anything else."

"Set the table! Threw a few things on, you mean," Agnes remarked witheringly. "I had to do it all over again."

"Well, I never took Domestic Science," Harvey hedged; "so I'm not supposed to know anything about housekeeping."

"Lola and I will wash the dishes," Mrs. Dove announced, "if Harvey will get the breakfast to-morrow morning. That seems fair. He likes getting up in the morning better than the rest of us do."

"That's all right," Harvey agreed. "Breakfast is easy. The oatmeal will cook all night in the fireless, and then there's only coffee to make, and eggs to boil. You don't need toast; it's too much of a luxury."

"I don't mind, if we only have bread," said Lola. "But how are we going to get that? We can't have it sent in with the groceries. It would be stale and horrid."

Mrs. Dove looked hesitatingly at Marian. "Do you suppose your mother could be induced to make some for us, when she bakes bread for herself?" she inquired. "It would save our lives."

"I don't know." Marian felt that her mother had enough to do; but it was not much more work to make four loaves than two. "I'll ask her."

"I'd just as lief get the lunch to-morrow, if Harvey gets the breakfast," said Lola. And so they went on planning the meals for at least a day ahead. Mrs. Dove tried not to look worried, though she still deplored the unreasonableness of colored maids.

After supper, when Marian was about to go, Mrs. Dove, her sleeves rolled up for the dishwashing, called Marian to her, and took her hand. "To-morrow," she whispered, "I'm coming over to talk with you about your studies. And you'll let me see something that you've written, if you have anything, won't you?"

"Of course, if you want to bother," the girl returned. "But it seems like asking a good deal of you."

"I'd like to do it. You see, I've looked after our children coming on in the high school — first Harvey, and now Lola and Agnes — and I think I have an idea of what's required. I might make some kind of an estimate of where you are, and talk things over with you a bit."

"You're awfully good," Marian replied with gratitude. "I wish there were something that I —"

"There is something," Mrs. Dove said, still speaking in a low voice; "if you could persuade your

mother to let me see some more of those delightful old things of hers, that would be doing me a favor. And perhaps there might be something she would let me buy — you wouldn't mind, would you?"

"No. I'm willing that she should do just exactly as she likes about the things," Marian replied. "They're hers, and I haven't any claim on them. If you really want them, you might at least see what she says."

"I'll get up courage enough, I think," Mrs. Dove smiled. "But I don't want to be greedy or over-persuasive."

"You won't be." Marian went on home, considering various matters, being a member, as she had said lately, of "the ways and means committee."

She had a private conference with Mrs. Dove the next day, while Mrs. Frear was busy up stairs. "Now, there's nothing to be frightened of," said the lady, noting the girl's nervous demeanor. "I'm not an ogre, and I don't know that my opinion counts for anything. Have you anything around that you have written?"

Marian flushed. "Yes, I have a few things that I wrote last winter, and in the spring, on rainy days, and in the evenings when we were here alone."

"What sort of things?"

"Oh, about birds and animals, and things that I saw. The birds were coming back, and I watched them. And a pair of blue jays built a nest in the grape vine outside the kitchen window." Marian's eyes lighted at the remembrance. "It was so interesting! I used to train them, and feed them. They got so that they would eat out of my hand, and

let me take up the little birds. And then I had a tame gopher —"

"Let me see the things." Mrs. Dove was sober and noncommittal.

Marian brought out a number of sheets of paper and an old composition book, into which she had copied some of her work. Mrs. Dove sat down in the rocking chair, and began glancing them over. She read rather sternly, with the air of a teacher, her brows knitted and her mouth tightly closed. Marian, watching her, felt self-conscious and nervous, and wondered whether the writings were dreadfully bad. She was relieved when Mrs. Dove laid down the first paper, with "Not bad. Not bad, at all." She read on through the others, and laid them aside. "These are rather good, in fact," she said, with her eyes on the girl's flushed face. "You have something to say in each one of them. I've always said that the main thing in writing anything is to be sure that you have something to say, and then the rest will take care of itself."

"Well, I *was* interested in the birds and the gopher," Marian explained; "and when I was writing I thought how I could make it all clear to some one who didn't know anything about it."

"I believe you had the right idea," Mrs. Dove replied. "There are one or two places where you've made little mistakes. See, you've left out the quotation marks, here, where you're telling what you thought the bird said." Her finger pointed out the place. "And here you've forgotten to capitalize. That's bad. One has to be perfectly exact about those things."

"It was awfully careless of me," Marian confessed. "I knew better, of course. But that's no excuse, is it?"

"No, I don't think it is." Mrs. Dove smiled frankly. "You couldn't explain that after you'd taken an examination, and been marked down for the mistakes. But anyhow, I don't think that there's any doubt that you could very quickly pass out of the freshman English into the second-year work. That would save you a good deal of time. It's too bad you haven't had a language. That would be a great advantage."

"Mother's taught me a little French," Marian ventured. "She had lots of it when she was a girl; and in the winters, when we've been here alone all day, you know, she's started me, with some old books she had."

"Oh, that's magnificent!" cried the lady extravagantly. "You should have said so. Can you read it?"

"Yes, quite easily." Marian shifted in her chair. "I can understand it as I read. My pronunciation may not be perfect, and I don't suppose I could talk very much with any one, but —"

"This is a surprise," Mrs. Dove repeated. "Get one of your books, and we'll see what you can do."

Marian brought a book of stories, and translated, Mrs. Dove looking over her shoulder. "You're all right," the older woman said with as much interest and relief as if she herself were involved. "You can surely get credit for this."

"I don't know that they have a French course at

Willford," Marian answered; " in fact, I think they don't."

" Oh, dear! you ought to get credit after all your work," frowned the guest. " Perhaps you won't go to Willford; perhaps you'll go to a better high school."

Marian looked blank. " I don't see how I could," she made reply. " It's problem enough to get to Willford."

" Well, you have more than a year of a modern language, anyhow." The golden head under the wide black hat nodded with approval.

" It would be splendid if I could get through in less than four years," Marian ruminated. " I'll be so old, anyway — and I'm in such a hurry to get so that I can help mother —"

" Well, we have to take things a day at a time," Mrs. Dove remarked in all soberness; " though I'm the last to practice what I preach," she added, smiling humorously at her didacticism. " I'm so impulsive — my mind is always flying ahead of my body." She looked very pretty as she sat there in a thin rose-colored gown, with white organdie trimmings. A moon-stone bracelet of odd silver filagree tinkled on her arm as she raised her hand to her hair. Marian had come to love her greatly, though she did not exactly understand how one could be such a combination of the young girl and the woman of the world. " I don't think you need to worry a bit about entering the high school, nor about getting through in less than four years," Mrs. Dove was saying. " Lola says you've had algebra, and there'll be some way in which that can be made to count."

"You certainly do encourage me," responded the girl, taking the lady's hand. "There's mother, coming down stairs."

Mrs. Frear entered, saying, "I thought I'd give you two a chance to talk things over. Did you come to any conclusions?"

"Yes, everything is settled for twenty-five years." Mrs. Dove glanced understandingly at Marian. "And now it's your turn. I want to have a conference with you."

"With me?" Mrs. Frear looked puzzled. "What about?"

"About old treasures. Dear Mrs. Frear," Mrs. Dove began in a quaint pleading way, "I'm never really easy when I know that there's some fascinating old relic about, that I haven't had a peep at." She smiled at her hostess so ingenuously that the other lady smiled in return.

"I'd love to let you see them," she replied, "but I don't know that you'll consider them so very choice, after all the beautiful things you've seen."

"I'll risk that," was the eager answer.

"Merry, dear, don't you want to get those old pieces of china from the top shelf in my closet?" Mrs. Frear turned to the girl at her elbow.

"I'd like to, mother, but I don't want to be responsible for them. Will you stand and take them as I hand them down to you?"

"Why, of course. But you wouldn't break them."

The two went up stairs to Mrs. Frear's bed-room. Marian stood on a chair, and her mother hovered beside her. One by one, the plates and cups and

pitchers were handed down from the shelf. "Oh, mother!" Marian exclaimed, "I never realized how pretty they were. I really haven't seen them for years."

"They are lovely." The older woman ranged them on the top of an old mahogany chest of drawers, where they glowed with a richness of gold and blue, and of the exquisite sprays of flowers brightly scattered over them. Mrs. Frear and Marian carried a few pieces down the steep stairs.

Mrs. Dove, an impatient figure, was sitting beside the window. She sprang up at sight of the china. "Oh, the beautiful things!" she burst out, with unconcealed delight. She took a cup into her hand with the same loving touch which Marian had noted in the episode of the luster pitcher. "They *are* gems!" she murmured, under her breath. She turned the cup over and examined the mark on the bottom. "Gems!" she reiterated. Then she took a plate, while the two other women put the rest of the dishes on the table. She was muttering something about marks and dates which Marian could not distinguish. Absorbed in her contemplation of the treasures, she made no remark while the remainder of the pieces were being brought down stairs and displayed. She stood back with her hands clasped, staring at the array. "And to think these have been hidden away for years," she breathed. "It seems almost cruel not to have had any one looking at them. But perhaps they were being saved for me!" She glanced inquiringly at her hostess.

Mrs. Frear took up a cup and turned it meditatively in her hands. "They are really very choice,

I know," she said with her unassuming candor. "I was afraid I should be tempted to use them too commonly, if I once began. And Marian was such a little smasher when she was a youngster. I thought the best thing was to put the china away until the right time came to bring it out."

"The right time has come!" Mrs. Dove made a dramatic gesture. Mrs. Frear regarded her questioningly. "I must have them — all these." The younger woman's voice was almost beseeching. "Would you — could you part with them?"

Mrs. Frear hesitated and looked at Marian. "Yes, I think I could," she said in her soft but decisive way. "They might as well do some good as to stand on the closet shelf." Whatever pangs of renunciation she felt, she skillfully concealed. Marian dimly felt that it was hard for her mother to give up these heirlooms, but that the eagerness for a daughter's welfare stifled all other considerations.

"That's the right way to regard it." Mrs. Dove did not hide her satisfaction. "I'm so glad you can look at it from a practical standpoint." A practical standpoint was something with which Mrs. Dove herself was not too familiar. "I'm perfectly delighted!"

Mrs. Frear's brown eyes were a trifle sad as she surveyed the table spread with the richly colored porcelain. "Oh, yes, I'm thoroughly practical!" she returned, with a faint tinge of irony in her voice.

Mrs. Dove was so occupied with examining the individual pieces that she did not notice. "Now about the price —" she began with a slight hesitation. "It is a bit hard for gentlewomen to discuss

those things between themselves, but you're such a sensible woman that one can be perfectly out-and-out."

Then followed consultation and argument, intermingled with "Are you *sure?*" and "You sha'n't take a cent less!" At last the bargain was made, at a figure which seemed to Marian no less than a fortune.

"It seems like a good deal," faltered Mrs. Frear.

"None too much. Things like this don't grow on every bush — not even on Christmas trees!" the purchaser assured her. "Don't consider me generous. I'm merely fair."

It was a relief when Harvey came to the back door and called, "Are you ready, Aunt Elsie?"

"Yes, boy! One moment —" Mrs. Dove looked about for her parasol and handbag.

"Do you want to take these things now?" queried Mrs. Frear.

"Not now; not till they're paid for. I'll send to Willford for a barrel, and plenty of excelsior. I know how to pack china, though I don't like to risk any as precious as this. Anyhow, there's no professional packer here, and I'll have to do the best I can." Mrs. Dove looked out of the window. A strong wind had risen, and the sky was getting gray. "I must hurry. And thank you — thank you very, very much, Mrs. Frear!"

"The thanks are all on our part." Mrs. Frear and Marian went to the door, outside which Harvey was playing with Rosy-Nosey.

"There's going to be a storm, but we can get home if we hurry," Harvey announced, refusing to

stay, but accepting a handful of caraway cookies. He and his jubilant relative hurried away, with scanty time for good-byes.

Marian turned and put her arms around her mother, hugging her closely and a little consolingly.

"Poor Mummy! I don't believe you want to let them go," she whispered. "Is it awfully hard?"

"Well, it isn't easy," confessed the mother. "But oh, Marian, this will make so much difference to us!"

"I know. But the china was your mother's, and then her mother's before that —"

"My mother and her mother would have liked it to give pleasure to some one, and help you to get a start in life. Every step you take will help you to take the next."

"Even if I have to step on the dishes." Marian's laugh was tremulous. "I felt like running and hiding every piece, and saying that we wouldn't sell it for love or money. But I knew that you would do what you thought best. I do hope I can make things up to you sometime, mother. And I want you to profit by this sacrifice — I want you to get out among people, and lead, in a little bit of a way, at least, the kind of life that you ought to be leading."

"We'll have to be careful of this money. It's really only a little, when we compare it with what we need. But it will give us courage to go to Willford, and you can get started there — and then we'll see how things turn out, after that."

Mrs. Frear was so pleased and hopeful that Marian could not help sharing her enthusiasm. The

next time she was at the Spaldings', she confided to Lola how much "Aunt Elsie's" passion for old china had meant in solving the problem of going to school.

"I'm just as glad as I can be!" Lola exclaimed; but Marian thought she had a queer look, as if she knew something she was not telling, or as if she did not approve her aunt's buying the dishes.

Marian felt her ardor dampened for a moment, but she said to herself, "I suppose it seems like a small thing to Lola that one can go to a country high school, and live in a poor sort of way. Only, she seemed so interested before —" Marian said no more, and the two girls sat for a little while without saying much. They were snuggled on the big cot-cofa in the living-room at Pigeon's Nest. Agnes was reading on the porch, and Mrs. Dove was in the hammock. Mrs. Dove's voice sounded through the open door. "Agnes, dear, don't you want to go up and get that book that I left on the table in Lola's room when I was up there this morning?"

After a pause, Agnes gave a sigh. "Yes, Auntie," she said in a far-away tone, as if she had hardly heard. "In Lola's room, did you say?"

"Yes, I'm sure it must be there."

Agnes rose and came into the house, still holding her book in front of her. Intent on her reading, she passed the two girls on the sofa, and stumbled up the stairs, coming back with another book in her left hand. She went out to the porch to complete her mission.

Then came Mrs. Dove's voice again. "Oh, I'm

so sorry, dear. This isn't the book I meant. It's one with a green cover. Perhaps I left it on the dresser."

Agnes sighed again. "Well, I'll see, Aunt Elsie," she said briefly, and repeated the journey up the stairs and back.

Marian's face flushed with indignation. For a long time she had wanted to speak, and now she began abruptly. "There's something that worries me, lots of times when I'm over here," she said, looking sidewise at Lola.

Her companion gave her a startled glance. "Why, what is it?" she asked wonderingly.

"I don't know that I ought to say it." Marian's courage almost left her. "You've all been so nice to me, for no reason in the world except that you're all so kindhearted — it seems horried of me to find fault." She was speaking in a low tone, so that those on the veranda should not hear.

"You arouse my curiosity," answered Lola, much troubled. "What is it that worries you, as you say?"

"It's Agnes —" Marian began.

"Agnes!" Lola looked perplexed.

"The way you treat her." Marian set herself to her task.

"I, you mean? Or everybody?"

"All of you — not you in particular."

"Why —" Lola opened her eyes in astonishment, "don't we treat Agnes well?"

"Yes, in most ways." Marian colored wretchedly, but she was determined to go on.

"In what ways don't we?" Lola wrinkled her forehead and blinked.

"Everybody is always asking her to do something for them," the other girl blurted out, still with a lowered voice. "They always seem to think that if they say, 'That's a dear,' or, 'That's a good girl,' they're somehow making it up to her. It wouldn't be so bad if it were only one person, but when it's all three, and all the time — I think it's too much," she finished, choking.

Lola stared at her in blank amazement. "Why, I don't remember —" she said, and then checked herself, as if she had begun to remember.

"I know it's awfully bold of me to say anything like this." Marian was contrite but firm. "After I got started, I couldn't stop."

Lola was frowning, her hands clasped in her lap. "Agnes takes it in good part," she said slowly.

"Does she? Isn't she always complaining?"

"M-maybe. But I thought that was — er — just a matter for form"; Lola smiled in a stricken sort of way,—"just to 'save her face,' as they say. It never occurred to me that we were putting too much on her."

"I don't suppose it hurts her just to do the things themselves," Marian admitted, "though I should think she'd get tired with trotting around; but it isn't very nice to be always waiting on some one."

"I don't believe she waits on us very much." Lola was still unconvinced. "What has she done to-day?"

"I don't know what she did before I came,"

Marian returned, "but since I've been here she has"— She counted on her fingers —"One: Taken Harvey's spoon-hooks down to the dock. Two: Put up two sandwiches and taken them down to him. Three: Brought your aunt two books and a handkerchief — that's two trips up stairs and one to Mrs. Dove's bedroom: Four: Lent you some of her writing-paper; another trip up stairs. Five: Picked the sand-burrs off your skirt; she had to go up stairs to get the skirt, and make a trip to the kitchen to burn up the burrs. Six: Emptied the drip-pan under the ice-box, because everybody forgot it when the kitchen-work was done this morning. Seven:—"

"Oh, my goodness!" Lola gasped. "Don't tell me any more. Has she done all that?"

"You remember them, don't you?" Marian asked, without pity.

"Well, yes, I do. But it doesn't seem possible."

"Seven —" repeated Marian, ready to go on.

"Don't." Lola put out her hand. "Oh, dear! Are we like that?"

"You don't realize how it has been." Marian was pinching the folds of her dress nervously. "I noticed it almost the first thing."

"No, we haven't realized," Lola confessed. "She's the youngest, and little by little we've let ourselves impose on her. It seems sort of natural to ask her to do things, you know. When mother was ill, Agnes ran errands for us, and I guess we just kept it up."

"It isn't right."

"No, it isn't." Lola looked her distress.

Just then they heard Mrs. Dove speaking on the porch,—"Agnes."

"M-huh?" came from the younger girl, who was still deep in her reading.

"Dearie, won't you bring me a knife or something? These leaves aren't cut," said Mrs. Dove in a dulcet tone.

"M-m-m," Agnes replied. "Can't you use a hair-pin?"

"I haven't any wire ones; the other kind tear the page," said Mrs. Dove with patience.

"All right." With a loud sigh, Agnes got up, stumbling against the legs of her chair.

Lola rose from the sofa as Agnes appeared in the doorway. "I'll get it, Aggie," she said quietly. "Auntie wants a knife, doesn't she?"

Agnes looked up into Lola's face, in astonishment. "I was going to get it for her," she defended herself. "I didn't hurry, because I thought at first that she could use a hair-pin."

"I'll get it," Lola replied. "You go back to your book."

Agnes stood transfixed. "I thought I was the errand-boy for this family," she said, staring. "I shouldn't feel natural if I could sit still and read for five minutes without being asked to do something." She spoke without sarcasm, simply stating a fact.

"I'll go." Lola went into the dining-room and brought a silver knife from the drawer. "We forgot to bring a paper-knife," she explained to Marian.

Agnes did not go back to her book. She stood watching her sister in a puzzled way, and then fol-

lowed her to the porch. Marian rose and stood in the doorway.

Lola held out the handle of the knife to her aunt. "Auntie," she said in a clear determined voice, "do you know what we're doing to Agnes?"

Mrs. Dove lowered her book absently. "To Agnes?" she repeated in mild bewilderment.

"Yes, Auntie. Do you realize that we're making a slave out of Little Sister?"

"Nonsense, Lola." Mrs. Dove took the knife and began to cut the pages of the book. "Good gracious, what do you mean?"

"Why, we keep asking her to do things for us all the time," Lola answered with as much indignation as if she had discovered Little Sister's servitude, herself. Agnes started and gasped, but said nothing.

"Supposing we do?" Mrs. Dove's white forehead showed a line of irritation. "All the time? Now, that's an exaggeration, Lola. I hardly ever ask her to do anything for me."

"How many times have you asked her to do things for you since you got into the hammock?" asked Lola, without impertinence, but with relentless coolness.

"Really, Lola —" Mrs. Dove raised her eyes protestingly.

"Well, how many?"

"Once, I suppose." Several more lines had appeared in the lady's forehead. "I asked her to get me a book —"

"Two books. The first one wasn't what you wanted."

"Er — yes. Two books."

"She had to go up stairs for both of them. And before that, a handkerchief."

"M-maybe."

"And a paper-cutter."

"My stars! have I asked her as many times as that?" Mrs. Dove looked over at the younger girl with a contrite glance. "Did I bother you that many times, dear?"

"Yes, Auntie, but —" Agnes began, eager to clear herself of the charge of complaining.

"Do you think we're imposing upon Agnes?" The older woman turned in a guilty way to Lola and Marian.

"I'm sure of it, Aunt Elsie," Lola made answer. "Marian called my attention to it."

"Then you've noticed it?" Mrs. Dove questioned the guest.

"Yes, yes — all the time; ever since I began coming here." Marian was excited and ashamed, and glad, too, that she had had the courage to speak.

Mrs. Dove held out her hands to Agnes. "You poor dear," she said in a self-reproachful tone, "come to me." Agnes, her breast heaving, walked over to the hammock. Mrs. Dove put her arms around the young girl, and held her close, patting her shoulder with a white, ringed hand. "We didn't mean it," she murmured. "We hadn't an idea we were treating you so badly. You're Auntie's honey, and she wouldn't be unkind to you for anything in the world."

"It — it's all right," came from Agnes in a muffled voice. But she clung to her aunt as if in weariness and relief.

Mrs. Dove looked at the others over Little Sister's shoulder. "Now that I survey the past," she said with a painful smile, "I am forced to admit that we have been thoughtless, and that I've been as bad as any one."

"That poor kid," muttered Lola, "running around after a lot of lummoxes who were perfectly able to wait on themselves!" Marian was startled at Lola's temerity in calling Mrs. Dove, by implication, a "lummox," but nobody seemed to take offense.

"We'll turn over a new leaf." Mrs. Dove spoke decidedly, giving Agnes a kiss on the cheek. "There, dear! We're not going to make a bell-boy of you any more."

"Oh, Auntie, I hope you'll let me do things for you sometimes." Agnes stepped back, wiping her eyes.

"No danger!" Mrs. Dove spoke in humorous accusation of herself. "It will probably be hard enough for me to get out of the habit."

"Me, too," Lola agreed. "But I'm not going to be a selfish tyrant any more; and Harvey's got to look out what he does, or we'll all get after him. If he wants spoon-hooks and sandwiches, he can come up and get them."

"But he was washing out the boat." Agnes excused her beloved brother.

"It doesn't make any difference what he was doing," Lola scolded. "He can wait on himself."

"We all like to do a little something for each other once in a while." It was hard for Agnes to give up the habit of subservience.

"We'll have plenty of chances." Lola was indignant and practical.

Agnes came over and took hold of Marian's arm affectionately. Just then a trill startled them all, and they saw Harvey coming up the hill from the lake. They had been so earnestly occupied that they had not heard his boat at the dock. "Hello, folks!" he called.

"Hello, Harvey," Lola returned without great enthusiasm.

The boy was waving a letter. "From father!" he cried. "I walked over to the mail-box. And what do you think?"

"Oh, what?"

"He's coming — to-morrow or next day. He says we're not to expect him till he comes — but that he's sure to be here — and may be he can stay a week!"

"Hooray!" Agnes whooped and squeezed Marian's arm nearly black-and-blue. There was a chorus of astonishment and delight.

Again Marian thought, as she had so often thought this summer, "What a wonderful thing to have a father!" But this thought was supplemented by another: "It's a wonderful thing to have a mother, too, and I have one!"

Harvey came rushing up to the porch with the precious letter, and for the moment the emancipation of Agnes was forgotten. But Marian, when she remembered it afterward, was electrified at her own boldness; and she was happy, also, in its expression and its result.

CHAPTER XIII

A SURPRISE PARTY

"MOTHER, do you realize that we're always busy," said Marian—"so busy that we never sit down together in the afternoon, and just rest and talk?"

Mrs. Frear considered for a moment, while she gave a last polish to the kitchen table. "Perhaps that's true, dear," she said, smiling, "but we're busy people; and besides, we do often have our evenings together."

"Yes, I know." Marian hung up the dish-towel. "But I'm speaking of the afternoon. It's so warm,—let's take it easy, and have a little party of our own; be ladies of leisure, you know."

"I'm ready for a party, any day." Mrs. Frear spread the denim cover on the table. "What is your idea, Baby?" This last word was one which she sometimes used as a mark of extreme affection.

"Nothing very exciting, mother; just a nice restful time. Won't you put on your blue dimity dress? It's all fresh; I ironed it yesterday, you know. And I'll put a rug and a table and some chairs out under the maples, and we'll read those new magazines, and then after a while we'll have some refreshments."

Mrs. Frear patted the glowing cheek of the girl. "Why, of course. I'd love all that," she con-

fessed. "I've had quite enough work for one day, myself."

Marian jumped happily, clasping her hands. "I'll hurry and get ready," she said. "Take all the time you want, mother, for I'll see to things."

Mrs. Frear obediently went up stairs to put on the gown which she had been instructed to wear. Marian ran up a few minutes later, and changed into a thin white blouse and the gray linen skirt which Mrs. Dove had given her; and her white canvas pumps. She paused a moment in front of the glass, to give a last dab to her hair, softly coiled without the net which she had learned to wear while at her work.

"How much happier I look!" she said impulsively, half-aloud. The fresh color in her cheeks, and the redness of her lips emphasized the look of animation which she wore She stood a moment, considering her reflection in the glass; and then she took out of a drawer a string of old coral beads, berry-red and clasped with dull gold. She fastened it around her neck, above the low collar of the blouse. Hesitatingly she slipped on a gold and coral bracelet to match, holding out her slender brown wrist to study the effect. "It's a lovely color, and not too fussy," she said, as she turned away to go down stairs.

Marian took a rug made of two lengths of clean rag-carpet, in stripes of soft colors, and spread it on the grass under the maple trees in the side yard. Then she brought out a light old Chinese table — the only one left of a "nest" which had graced her grandmother's hall, years ago. A linen cover protected the lacquer, and hid sundry stains of age.

Two low chairs beside the stand completed the setting for the "party."

"It's just like the pictures of the tea-parties in the magazines," Marian exulted.

She went to get the magazines which the Spaldings had lately lent her, and met her mother coming across the grass. "Oh, stand right there! I want to look at you," the girl exclaimed.

Mrs. Frear, rather puzzled, stood still beside a bank of pink and white verbenas. She wore the freshly laundered blue dimity gown, which was faded to a soft warm tone Her neck was uncovered, and circled by an old embroidered collar of the finest French handiwork. A heavy gold chain with long fringed pendants of onyx and seed pearls hung down along her bosom. Her dark glossy hair was done in two braids bound round her head in a girlish way, extremely becoming to the fresh-faced woman.

"Mother! how pretty you are!" Marian clasped her hands. "I knew you were *nice*-looking, but I didn't realize how lovely you were."

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Frear blushed and made a gesture of incredulity.

"Those old things that you usually wear — the sacque and the sunbonnet — aren't — well — suited to your style of beauty," Marian answered teasingly. "But these things are."

"Goosey!" Mrs. Frear laughed as she proceeded across the lawn; but she did not look displeased.

"I wish I had a blue silk dress for you," Marian continued, raising her voice —"all soft chiffon-y stuff, with draperies and lace —"

"I should be spoiled," called Mrs. Frear over her shoulder.

Marian went on into the house after the magazines. "Mother isn't much older than Mrs. Dove," she meditated. She had not thought much about that aspect of things before; it had always seemed as if one's mother must be rather old.

She came back, and she and her mother both sat down to read. Mrs. Frear had a bit of mending, too, in a faded orange-silk bag. "It's a nice party," sighed the girl, fingering the leaves of the new magazine.

"Isn't it?" The mother was already deep in a story.

Rosy-Nosey came daintily stepping through the long grass, and cuddled up on the rug at Marian's feet. An hour passed. A good breeze blew through the branches of the maple. It fluttered the grass, and lightly touched the hair of the two silent women. There was hardly a sound except the occasional reëchoing crow of a cock, or the quacking of the ducks on their way to the lake.

"Don't you think it's time for refreshments?" Marian put down her book, looking inquiringly across the table at her mother.

"Yes, indeed, I'm ready."

"I'll go and get them." Marian went into the house, and prepared a big pitcher of iced raspberry shrub (there was an ice-house on the place, which Mr. Grant and his man filled for them every winter, from the lake); and a plate of oatmeal cookies. These viands she carried on a tray to the scene of the "party." "Isn't it a lovely color?" She stood

back to enjoy the deep red of the shrub, showing through the clear glass.

She had just begun to pour out a glassful, when she was arrested by a call from the meadow. "Whoo-hoo!" It was Lola's voice.

Marian stood on tiptoe to look across the garden. "Mother! It's Lola and Mr. Spalding," she said. "How glad I am that we dressed up!" She gave a satisfied glance at the lady in the chair.

"Run and tell them that we're out here," Mrs. Frear said placidly, "and bring two more glasses."

In a few minutes, they all came through the garden gate, and across the grass, Marian carrying the two glasses, and Lola a plate with more cookies on it. They were all laughing and talking. Mr. Spalding looked cool and handsome in a pongee silk suit and white silk shirt. Lola wore a thin white dress, not new, with a rose-pink velvet belt.

After a good deal of handshaking and preliminary talk, Marian poured the shrub and passed the cookies. The girls sat down on the rugs, and the two older people took the chairs. Mrs. Frear and Mr. Spalding were talking about a big pickerel which Harvey had just caught, and of the advantages of this somewhat isolated lake.

"How sweet your mother looks," whispered Lola under cover of the talk.

"Doesn't she? I never realized it before," Marian returned; "that is, I've been so selfish that I've never really looked at her, I guess."

"Father has a surprise for you and your mother," Lola whispered again, after finishing a glass of shrub.

Marian turned a questioning face toward her

friend. "A surprise?" she murmured. "What is it?"

"If I told, it wouldn't be one," Lola answered, with mischief in her eyes. She was pulling softly at Rosy-Nosey's white ears.

"Oh, Lola!" Marian was reproachful.

"Listen. You'll hear soon enough. He's twiddling his watch-chain, and that's a sign that he's fussed and doesn't know how to begin."

"Yes, Mrs. Frear," Lola's father was saying, "this is a delightful place for a summer's outing. The youngsters have enjoyed it hugely. But it's time that they — we — all of us — began to think about the fall; school, and all that, you know."

Mrs. Frear looked over at Marian. "I suppose so," she said slowly. "Marian and I have been rather dreading the time when we should have to say good-bye to our new friends."

Mr. Spalding gave her a genial look. "But you don't have to," he responded.

Mrs. Frear showed her perplexity. "Surely they aren't going to stay on here?" she said. "They ought to begin their school on time, oughtn't they?" She glanced from Lola's excited face to the father's more non-committal countenance.

"Not a doubt of it. They have to be on time for their work."

"Then what —?"

"Mrs. Frear, I have a plan to suggest to you"; Mr. Spalding spoke gravely. "If you don't like it, — well, I'll be sorry. But I hope you will."

"What is it?" The lady looked almost alarmed.

"You know I have these three youngsters on my hands," the man began, with a humorous glance at Lola; "my sister has been tremendously kind to look after them for a number of years — giving up all her own affairs in life. I've been talking with her, and with Harvey and the girls. They thought I might ask you if you would come to our house, and supervise it — and bring your daughter along."

"Oh!" Marian gripped Lola's hand.

"Sh-h!"

Mr. Spalding was going on. "You see, I'm away so much that there ought to be some one at home — a kind of — what shall I call it?" He looked confused. "*House-keeper* doesn't express it —"

"*Home-keeper,*" suggested Mrs. Frear, with her earnest eyes on the man's face.

"That's it." Mr. Spalding spoke with relief. "A home-keeper — some one to keep the home together, and make it right for the young people. Marian here,—" He turned and looked at the two girls on the rug —"could go to the high school with my girls. Harvey's away during the week, but usually comes home for Saturday and Sunday. You'd have a good maid to do the work. There'll be a bit of a salary —"

"Oh, but if Marian and I should both stay —" broke in Mrs. Frear, anxious to be fair.

"Never mind; there'll be a salary — not a large one, you know, but a few dollars. And as far as Miss Marian is concerned, I want to be able to do something for her now and again. I can't forget what she did for Agnes."

Marian found that her heart was beating heavily

with embarrassment and anxiety. "That wasn't much," she said hurriedly. "Almost any one could have done it."

"The fact remains that noboby else did," Mr. Spalding returned, still with his eyes on Mrs. Frear.

Marian looked over at her mother, who sat with her hands folded tightly in her lap, above the orange silk bag. The woman's eyes were on the glinting blue of the lake, showing through the cherry-trees and poplars on the shore. The girl was faintly aware of the thoughts that were active in her mother's mind — thoughts of earlier and happier years, of the longer, harder years of toil and loneliness and deprivation, which after all had not failed in loving companionship; and of the habit and inertia which make it hard to change an environment even when opportunity offers. Would her mother go? Marian clung to Lola's hand, and held her own thought suspended in the one desire to hear the word which would decide her course in life.

Mrs. Frear had turned to Mr. Spalding. Warm color suffused her cheeks. "Yes, I think I should be glad to do as you suggest," she said in her clear decisive way. Marian drew a long breath. "It's a wonderful opportunity for Marian," Mrs. Frear went on, "and I can't deprive her of it. But —"

"I hope you really want to go, for yourself," Mr. Spalding reminded her with gentleness.

"In a way, I do," was the reply. "But," Mrs. Frear repeated, twisting her fingers into the strings of the work-bag, "do you think I can do what you require? I've lived out here in the country for twelve years; I'm behind the times, and used to my

own ways. Perhaps I couldn't make your young people happy —"

"Ha!" Lola broke in, "you don't need to worry about the young folks, Mrs. Frear. They know whether you could make them happy or not."

"We'll risk that," added Mr. Spalding.

"If you're willing to risk it, I might *try* becoming the home-keeper at your house," Mrs. Frear responded. She was serious and dignified, not yet recovered from her surprise and uncertainty. "I love a house, and I love young people, so that you may be sure I shall be happy in looking after them."

"I have no doubt at all that you will do it well," Mr. Spalding assured her, speaking with relief.

Lola could contain her delight no longer. She rose and dragged Marian to her feet, and began whirling the bewildered girl around in a wild dance upon the grass. "Oh, you're coming to live at our house, at our house, tra-la-la!" she chanted, pulling Marian this way and that.

Marian came to a standstill at last, breathless and disheveled. "Oh, Lola, you've twisted me all to pieces!" she cried. "But isn't it wonderful? I can hardly believe it. It surely is a surprise!"

"Hadn't you thought about it at all?" asked Lola, while the older people were discussing the details of the new plan.

"Thought of it? Why should I? It never entered my mind," answered Marian blankly.

"Harvey and I had spoken of it two or three times — especially since we had the quarrel, and your mother helped him to make up. And Auntie had hinted at it, too. The other day, when you were

telling me about going to Willford to school, I could hardly keep from saying something, but I didn't dare, before we'd talked it over with father."

"I wondered why you seemed so uninterested in my going to Willford," Marian admitted. "But I thought maybe I'd bored you with my affairs."

"What an idea!" Lola reproached her friend. "Now you know what I was thinking."

"It was a wonderful thought," Marian sighed. "Things are queer, aren't they? I thought a few weeks ago that I was doomed to stay here forever, and now all at once the door is open and I can fly out!"

Lola's face was illumined. "That reminds me," she said in a low voice, "of what I was reading in the Bible the other day,— Auntie always has us read on Sunday morning, when we aren't where we can go to church. It was this, '*Behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.*'"

"That means me, I guess," said Marian, startled. She was silent, catching up her loosened hair, and thinking of the prospects which had suddenly been revealed to her.

"Well, if there is anything more to talk over, we can do it before I go," Mr. Spalding was saying. He rose and looked about for Lola. Mrs. Frear rose, too, with a word of appreciation for his kindness.

The four people walked slowly down through the garden and the meadow, to the landing-place. The *Paloma* was tied to the bass-wood tree, and Harvey was sitting in the boat, reading. He closed his book with a snap, and eagerly searched the faces which

appeared under the branches. "Is it all right?" he asked. "I believe it is, from the way you look."

"Yes, Harve, it's all right," Lola assured him joyously. "Mrs. Frear says she'll come."

"Good for Mrs. Frear!" The boy's eyes sought those of the "home-keeper" with real satisfaction. And then they gave Marian a glance of understanding. The girl realized that he knew how much this chance for study and development might mean to her.

Mr. Spalding and Lola settled themselves in the boat, and the party prepared to row away. "This has been a prosperous voyage," remarked the older man, raising his hat to the two women on shore. "I think we have discovered El Dorado."

"I hope that you haven't made any mistake," Mrs. Frear called after him. She was still a bit troubled over the suddenness of her own decision.

"No fear!" The boat was gliding out into the blue waters, and Lola was waving her hand. Harvey, at the oars, made a quick gesture of farewell.

Mrs. Frear and Marian stood watching the boat as it receded from the shore. Neither said a word. Marian had her hand on her mother's arm, and she gave it one quick pressure. Still silent, the mother and daughter turned and made their way up the path to the meadow. At the edge of the fringe of trees, they stopped with one accord, and gazed at the house beyond the garden.

"After all, we do love our little place, don't we, dear?" said Mrs. Frear at last.

"It will be dreadfully hard to give it up." Marian was already feeling the twinge of parting.

"I love the house and the garden and the lake," Mrs. Frear responded thoughtfully. "And I love the soil; I never realized how much."

"It's strange, but I do, too," Marian echoed, sharing her mother's emotion.

"But now that our chance has come, we must make the most of it. It will mean so much to us both! Oh, Marian, you'll get a start, and after that, there will be some other way —"

"I'll never give up hope again," murmured the girl contritely.

"O ye of little faith!" exclaimed Mrs. Frear under her breath. "Marian, child, the task before us isn't easy — living in another person's house, and adapting ourselves to new conditions, keeping our independence, and yet not holding ourselves aloof: it will take all the patience and good sense that we can muster."

"You're equal to it, Wonderful Lady." Marian put her arms around her mother, and kissed the pink cheek beside her own. "I know it will be a struggle for me — but I'm happy just the same. Aren't you?"

"I truly am." The mother's voice was grateful and full of eagerness.

Arm in arm they walked through the meadow to the little house. From out upon the lake came the sound of laughter, and then, as if very far away, Harvey's voice singing

"Shine on, shine on, O Jerusalem!"

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